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ABSTRACT

This document brings together three research-based papers that served as the catalyst for discussions at the third Mid-Continent Research for Education and Learning diversity roundtable. It was designed for distribution to conference participants to reinforce the essential points of the presentations. The introductory chapter sets the tone by highlighting the increasing diversity that characterizes the United States and its schools. Chapters 2 through 4 are the papers presented at the roundtable: (1) "Standards-Based School Reform and Culturally Diverse Learners: Implications for Effective Leadership When the Stakes Are Even Higher" (Brenda L. Townsend); (2) "Including Special Needs Students in Standards-Based Assessments" (Martha L. Thurlow); and (3) "Including Students with Special Needs in Standards-Based Reform: Issues Associated with the Alignment of Standards, Curriculum, and Instruction" (Alba A. Ortiz). The final chapter draws together the issues raised in the papers to present major areas in which educators can initiate or strengthen actions to improve the education of special needs students. Each paper contains references. (SLD)

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Including Special Needs Students in Standards-Based Reform:

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November, 2000

Dear Colleague:

Our nation's schools and classrooms have become increasingly diverse — a trend that no doubt will continue well into the future. As educators across the country align their practices with standards-based reform, they are faced with the challenging task of including a wide variety of students in that reform, many of whom have special needs. It is a daunting task. It is also a critical one since as a nation we have an obligation to develop the skills and talents of every young person who enters the classroom.

As part of McREL's leadership role in the area of curriculum, learning, and instruction, we held a series of three diversity roundtables addressing the issues central to including diverse student populations in standards-based reform. The third of these roundtables, which focused on special needs students, was held in Denver on September 14–15, 2000.

Three commissioned papers prepared by national experts were the basis for discussions and activities at the roundtable. Focusing on the unique needs of special needs students, the papers detail current research and effective practices. They also challenge readers to reflect on current policies and practices relative to the inclusion of special needs students in the standards-based reform movement. This publication includes the commissioned papers and a summary of the roundtable proceedings.

It is our intent that this publication serve as a catalyst for reflection and discussion regarding education policies and practices affecting special needs students. We hope you find this resource beneficial as you continue your efforts to help every child succeed.

Sincerely,

Tim Waters, Ed.D.
President and Executive Director

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This publication would not have been possible without the dedicated efforts of many people. Deep appreciation is extended to each of the writers. Their knowledge of the research findings and effective practices on special needs students has helped to provide educators with the knowledge they need to include these students in standards-based reform efforts. Sincere thanks also go to McREL staff, educators in the field, and others who provided guidance for the design and planning of the roundtable and contributed to the success of this publication.

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Finally, sincere thanks go to the participants who attended the roundtable. Their dedication to special needs students and their participation at the roundtable will help to ensure that these students reap the benefits of standards-based reform.

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PREFACE

This document is a compilation of the three research-based papers that served as the catalyst for discussions at the third Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL) diversity roundtable, held September 14-15, 2000 in Denver, Colorado. It will be distributed to the 43 roundtable participants to reinforce the essential points of the presentations and discussions. It is our hope that this document also will serve as a catalyst for further thought about the issues, provide a way to begin discussions with colleagues, and stimulate changes in practice and policy that translate into improved learning for special needs students.

This publication also will be distributed to key individuals in the seven-state region that McREL serves (Colorado, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Wyoming) through its contract with the U.S. Department of Education, including chief state school officers, appropriate staff at state departments of education, intermediate service agencies, and other federally funded service providers. It also will be available on McREL's Web site (http://www.mcrel.org) and will be mailed to anyone who requests a copy. For readers other than roundtable participants, the document can serve as an introduction to the issues related to special needs students in standards-based reform and as a resource for strategies to address the needs of special needs students, whether indirectly through professional development or directly through instructional strategies and other classroom approaches. We hope that readers seriously consider and use the suggested practices presented in the various papers. We also hope that this document inspires readers to study the topic further.

ORGANIZATION OF THIS DOCUMENT

This document has five chapters: an introduction; three research-based papers, commissioned for the roundtable; and a conclusion. Chapter One sets the tone by highlighting the increasing diversity that characterizes our nation, our communities, and our schools. This chapter also briefly describes the process of designing the roundtables and the goals that were identified by the members of the original roundtable planning committee.

Chapters Two through Four are the papers presented at the September 2000 roundtable. Although all of the papers address standards-based reform and the implications for special needs students, each of the writers approaches the topic from a different perspective. For example, in Chapter 2, the author offers comments and strategies for working with disenfranchised students, ethnic minority students, and students from impoverished backgrounds. In Chapter Three, the author focuses primarily on including students with disabilities in standards-based assessments. In Chapter Four, the author discusses issues associated with the alignment of standards, curriculum, and instruction for special needs students.

In their discussions of the implications of standards-based reform for special needs students, the writers raise our awareness about the issues that these students face. They also provide suggestions and models for helping teachers acquire the information and skills they need to improve instruction for students with special needs.

In Chapter Two, Dr. Brenda Townsend argues that when the primary focus of school reform efforts are high-stakes assessments, the stakes are highest for ethnic minority students and students from impoverished backgrounds. Dr. Townsend offers a real-life snapshot to show how schools' most vulnerable learners experience schooling. She identifies some of the mounting criticisms of high-stakes accountability systems and presents strategies for developing culturally responsive school leadership.

In Chapter Three, Dr. Martha Thurlow offers strategies for educators who are interested in successfully including students with disabilities and students who are gifted and talented in standards-based assessments. Dr. Thurlow describes the characteristics of a fully inclusive assessment system, then presents a discussion of critical issues that serve as barriers to the successful participation of special needs students in standards-based assessment systems. This discussion is followed by specific suggestions for ways in which to overcome these barriers and strategies for ensuring the success of special needs students in assessments.

In Chapter Four, Dr. Alba Ortiz discusses the involvement of students with special needs in standards-based reform, particularly in terms of the alignment of curriculum and instruction. Although Dr. Ortiz focuses primarily on students with disabilities, she also discusses issues related to cultural and linguistic diversity. Dr. Ortiz considers the effects of the changing demographics of America's classrooms on reform activities. She also includes strategies and barriers for including students with special needs in standards-based reform.

Each paper concludes with a set of questions that can be used to guide the development of teaching, administrative, and organizational practices that support the achievement of special needs students. These questions may be particularly helpful in a number of ways. For example, they might be used to focus discussions — whether through newsletters, informal discussions, or in faculty meetings, parent/community meetings, or teacher study groups — about ways in which to serve special needs students.

Chapter Five draws together the issues raised in the papers and through the roundtable discussions. This concluding chapter presents major areas in which educators can initiate or strengthen actions to improve the education of special needs students.

Taken together, the papers and the conclusion raise awareness about issues special needs students face and provide models for acquiring knowledge and skills to improve instruction for these students. By following the specific suggestions in the papers and the conclusion, educators can better meet the needs of special needs students and, thus, help them achieve greater academic and personal success.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The primary focus of the standards-based reform movement is increasing the academic achievement of *all* students. Yet today, this remains one of the most challenging issues encountered by low-performing schools. Although much progress has been made in the area of standards-based reform for mainstream students, "there continues to be a significant gap between the achievement of students with special needs (e.g., students with disabilities, those from low income backgrounds, students of color, and English Language Learners) and their middle class majority peers" (Goertz, Floden, & Oday, 1996, as cited in Ortiz, p. 41).

Special needs students include students with disabilities, students from low income backgrounds, students of color, English Language Learners, and gifted students. Clearly, these groups of students encompass a rather large number of students. Although it is difficult to estimate the total number of students with special needs, we do know that the number of special needs students continues to grow each year. More than five million students have disabilities and qualify for special education services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, which requires that states and local school districts include students with disabilities in education reform initiatives.

Special needs students have diverse characteristics and educational experiences. Finding the most effective and most appropriate ways to reach special needs students continues to be an obstacle to schools and districts realizing the vision of standards-based reform. Educators across the country — and, in particular, in the seven-state region that McREL serves — have expressed the need for ideas, suggestions, and help in learning new skills to address the needs of these students.

In response to this need and as part of its leadership role in the area of curriculum, learning, and instruction, McREL held a series of three roundtables about the implications of standards-based education for diverse populations. The focuses for the roundtables were, respectively, culturally and linguistically diverse populations, at-risk populations, and special needs populations.

SPECIAL NEEDS ROUNDTABLE DESIGN

In keeping with McREL's collaborative approach to working with educators in the region, recommendations were solicited from practitioners and researchers from the region and across the country. Practitioners and researchers were asked to share their perspectives about the needs of special needs populations and suggestions about possible areas of focus for the research papers. McREL used the recommendations from the planning committees for the first two roundtables to assist in the design of the Special Needs Roundtable. The following outcomes were identified for participants of the third roundtable:

1. To become familiar with current research findings and effective practices for educating special needs students

2. To examine standards-based reform and its implications for special needs students and the educators who work with them

3. To identify strategies that will ensure and support the inclusion of special needs students in standards-based reform

McREL's Special Needs Roundtable was designed around research-based papers prepared specifically for the event by three national experts. The event consisted of general sessions as well as small-group activities. Participants had many opportunities to dialogue with one another, to ask questions, and to personally interact with the presenters.

The general sessions served as forums for the writers to present their papers. Each writer was given 60 minutes to present his or her paper and to highlight key points. Participants were invited to listen to each presentation and make notes in the following areas, which they could then share in their small groups:

1. Concrete strategies suggested by the speaker that will ensure and support the inclusion of special needs students in standards-based reform

2. Points that participants wanted clarified or questions they wanted to ask

At the conclusion of each presentation, participants had the opportunity to ask questions of the writer. After the question-and-answer session, participants engaged in small-group discussions and sharing focused around the following discussion points:

1. Drawing upon the presentation you just heard, discuss strategies for successfully including special needs students in standards-based reform efforts. Share any insights gained from your own experiences.

2. Based on the discussion, what might you do differently in your work with special needs students to facilitate their inclusion in standards-based reform?

3. What questions or issues for further study does this paper raise?

Participants discussed the presentations in depth in small groups and dialogued about ideas for better meeting the learning needs of special needs students. Comments and ideas were recorded. During the small-group discussions, each of the writers circulated among the small groups and participated in discussions. Following the small-group discussions, each of the writers commented on particularly relevant questions or issues raised by the small groups and participated in an informal dialogue session with the audience, which resulted in a rich discussion. Roundtable facilitators took notes about participants' questions, answers, and comments during discussions.

CHAPTER TWO

STANDARDS-BASED SCHOOL REFORM AND CULTURALLY DIVERSE LEARNERS: IMPLICATIONS FOR EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP WHEN THE STAKES ARE EVEN HIGHER

by

Brenda L. Townsend, Ph.D.

ABSTRACT

The need for serious school reform initiatives is clear. Given the dire outcomes experienced by learners from ethnic minority and impoverished backgrounds, goals to raise academic standards are logical. This paper argues that when high-stakes assessments are the centerpieces of school reform, efforts can be both misguided and harmful. Without question, the stakes are highest for disenfranchised students who are schools' most vulnerable consumers. This paper draws on personal stories to offer a rationale for school reform for ethnic minority and impoverished students, discusses criticisms of high-stakes standardized testing, and identifies strategies for developing culturally responsive school leadership.

Dr. Brenda L. Townsend is an Associate Professor in the Department of Special Education at the University South Florida. In 1995, she developed Project PILOT, the first of several initiatives, that prepares African American men for urban special education teaching careers. She directs the Chrysalis Program that recruits African American women, Hispanic men and women, and European American males to teach urban children with special needs. Dr. Townsend is also the director of a national outreach and technical assistance project that enhances the urban school research capacity of faculty and graduate students in minority institutions. She co-authored a constructive behavior management text and several book chapters on schooling issues unique to African American children. Her scholarship also centers on the disproportionate disciplinary and instructional practices to which African American learners are subjected.

INTRODUCTION

In one of my favorite books, *A Gathering of Old Men*, author Ernest Gaines (1992) vividly shows that remarkable things can happen when folks begin to gather. So I am delighted that school leaders are gathered to openly dialogue about diversity in the context of school reform initiatives. It is not that diversity-related issues are rarely discussed. We talk about them quite frequently — but we usually do so in the privacy of our homes, in the confines of our offices, in the comfort of our communities, and with those who look, act, or think most like us. It is commendable that McREL is hosting a roundtable discussion that will set the stage and raise the curtain so we can openly reflect and discuss the impact of standards-based school reform on culturally and linguistically diverse students.

When I was invited to facilitate this discussion, I was honored. But the nature of the task forced me to take stock of my own experiences with people who differ from me. I had to ask the question: Even beyond ethnicity, how do I respond and interact with those who have different backgrounds in terms of language, gender, age, generation, region, social class, motivation, religion, communication style, philosophy, work ethic, lifestyle, and individual differences? Just to name a few.

Let me say at the outset that I am no expert on cultural diversity. In fact, on the continuum of appreciating others' differences, I slide up and down. My pendulum of valuing others many times swings back and forth. I have to admit that the scale on which I affirm those who are different is not always balanced. And, at times, my cup of advocacy for the "other" is half empty, as opposed to half full.

Therefore, I consider myself to be not an expert model of cultural responsiveness and cultural competence, but, rather, a coping or struggling model. According to the modeling literature, there are times when a model who has clearly mastered the skill at hand is not always the most useful. Instead, a more effective model might be someone who is consciously striving to become more proficient. In that regard, I continue to challenge my own thinking, and hopefully that of others, on diversity-related issues.

It is fairly easy to conclude that serious school reform is desperately needed to improve outcomes for ethnic minority and impoverished young people. Simply put, few would argue against school reform initiatives that aim to raise academic standards and expectations for these learners. However, although the intent may be noble and logical, the strategies that are currently being used to raise standards are misguided and may in effect be even more harmful to the students who tend to be most disenfranchised in school settings.

The purpose of this paper is threefold. First, in order to present a rationale for school reform for ethnic minority and poor children, this paper offers a real-life snapshot to show how schools' most vulnerable learners experience schooling. Impoverished students and students of color stand to lose the most when school reform is predicated on the doublespeak of attaining "high standards" using "high-stakes" measures. Second, this paper identifies some of the mounting criticisms of high-stakes accountability systems. As school districts are swept up in the national high-stakes movement, much responsibility rests on the shoulders of school leaders. These individuals will need to protect and advocate for all citizens, but will need to be particularly mindful of the segment of the population who Delpit (1996) refers to as "other people's children" — children of color and those from impoverished backgrounds. Third, this paper presents strategies for developing culturally responsive school leadership.

RATIONALE FOR SCHOOL REFORM FOR ETHNIC MINORITY AND POOR CHILDREN

The call for education reform could not ring more clearly or loudly for ethnic minority and impoverished learners. It has been well documented that children from these backgrounds experience inequitable academic and social outcomes (Gay, 2000; Delpit, 1996; Johnson, 1969).

Historically, these children overpopulate deficit-driven or special and remedial classes and are underrepresented in, or virtually absent from, gifted or advanced placement classes that are considered value added. That said, children of color and those who are poor often fill programs that assume that something is wrong with them (i.e., special and remedial education programs) (Harry & Anderson, 1994) and are rarely included in learning environments designed to nurture students' academic gifts and talents (Ford, 1996).

The achievement gap is widening between minority and majority culture students. That gap is not entirely explainable by poverty and other factors. For example, recent studies show that the achievement gap is actually wider between African American middle class students and their European American middle class peers than it is between African Americans from low-income backgrounds and their European American counterparts with similar family income levels. Disparity can also be observed between the rates at which European American youth graduate from high school and the school completion rates of Hispanic and African American students.

Consistent with that paradox, minority and poor learners suffer disproportionately from other negative schooling outcomes. When compared with their majority culture counterparts, African American students are suspended and expelled much more frequently (Townsend, 1999). It has been found that of all students, African American males are most subjected to draconian school disciplinary practices. The Office for Civil Rights (1993) reported on a national survey showing that although African American males make up 8.23 percent of the total student population, they were the recipients of corporal punishment and were suspended at rates that were over three times this percentage. Most studies of disciplinary practices clearly show that African American males, in particular, are disciplined in a way that consistently excludes them from opportunities to learn in school settings.

The disproportionate use of suspension and expulsion with African American students has wide-ranging effects. Among the most obvious is the denial of access to learning opportunities that occurs when students are not in school. When students receive out-of-school suspensions or expulsions, they typically are not offered opportunities to continue their schoolwork. This discontinuation of academic study is even more crucial given the history that these students have of underachievement — and even failure — in schools across the country.

Underachievement among African American students is so problematic that some scholars (e.g., Ford, 1996) have discussed it extensively in the literature. Given the widening achievement gap between African American students and their European American peers, these students can ill afford to continue to be excluded from school.

Disciplinary measures that exclude African American students from school may in effect widen the achievement chasm between African American students and dominant culture students. A cycle of low achievement may result when these students no longer have the opportunity to learn. The belief that students who are excluded from school will automatically lag behind their peers may cause frequently suspended students to be relegated to lower ability groups. Simply put, tracking, or the practice of placing students in low-ability groups, may be commonly used to remediate academic deficiencies resulting from those students' discipline-

related absences. Thus, although other students are exposed to and allowed to participate in general education and gifted programming, students with histories of school exclusion may end up solely in remedial programming. Consequently, they may receive poor academic grades and/or be retained in their current grades more frequently than other students. Thus, school exclusion may set a cumulative cycle in motion that reduces students' quality of life. Because these negative experiences also are factors that contribute to students' leaving school prior to graduation, they may decrease the likelihood that these students will succeed in life.

The need for school reform could not be more evident in the day-to-day living experiences of disenfranchised youth in schools. When I think about what school is like for other people's children, I am immediately reminded of an old childhood game, "Mother, May I?" If you recall, in that game the "Mother" — the power broker — would stand with his or her back to the children (giving the illusion of fairness and equal treatment). The object was to be the first one to make it to where the "Mother" was. One by one, each child would call out a request. "Mother, may I take three giant steps?" or "Mother, may I take five giant steps?" One by one, the Mother would grant your request. Or Mother would modify your request. For example, he or she might say, "No, you may not take three giant steps, but you may take two baby steps." Worse yet, the Mother might flat out deny your request. And if you did not comply or you protested, you were sent back to the starting line or were never advanced. Those simply were the rules.

We cannot begin to have this conversation without addressing the curriculum of control that operates in some classrooms that serve minority and poor children. I discovered rather early that for some teachers, teaching effectiveness is equated with control and management effectiveness. I figured out early in my schooling career that certain children were treated very differently from others. When I was in the fifth grade, I received one of the greatest privileges awarded in elementary schools — I went on an errand to the office for my teacher. As I very proudly neared the office, I heard quite a commotion down the hall. There was a teacher visibly upset by a little boy. The teacher was saying, "You will not walk into my classroom like that. Now you walk right back in there — and do it the right way." The little boy paused for a second and very slowly leaned back, cupped his right hand, crooked his arm, swung it behind him, and started his descent into the classroom.

The teacher was enraged. She yelled, "Get back out here and do it again." This went on several times, and each time, the boy exaggerated his movements even more. I was deeply disturbed by that incident. You see, the boy was my little brother, Brian. He was suspended for walking into the classroom in an "arrogant" way. He could not return until my mother could bring him back in, which cost her a day of work. Needless to say, I couldn't help but think how stupid the whole thing was. I was upset with the teacher for demanding that Brian change a behavior that was clearly hurting no one. He was merely imitating the "cool" way he saw older kids walking. And I was upset with him for not complying with her wishes and walking any way he wanted to when he got out of school.

As I reflect on my own schooling, I realize that I was granted giant steps, while Brian and my other brothers were always hurled back to the starting line. I could not understand why they didn't seem to want the school's rewards. I guess running errands, grading papers, and sitting

near the teacher meant nothing to them. As soon as he was old enough, Brian decided to stop playing the game.

Sadly, not much has changed in schools for many students. An elementary teacher shared the advice she was given when she was first assigned to teach in an urban school. Most of the veteran teachers counseled her to limit her students' movements and their choices. They even told her to get the pencil sharpener out in the morning, have everyone sharpen their pencils, and put the sharpener away. To my horror, she described other suggestions that were even more controlling. Because she was at a poor African American school, her induction by her colleagues took on a different form. In a dominant culture or higher income school, student choice and decision making probably would have been promoted. Instead, the focus was on military-like student management techniques that discounted individuality. School leaders must ensure that school personnel address issues related to ethics, power, privilege, and control.

In classrooms across the nation, the most negative outcomes seem reserved for "other people's children." Ironically, outcomes for ethnic minority and poor students are getting worse and worse. Yet, convincing schools and universities to take ownership and alter their practices is getting more and more difficult. I often encounter resistance no matter how much data I present to show that ethnic minority and poor children are overrepresented in special education and remedial classes, underrepresented in gifted classes, disproportionately suspended and expelled, and drop out of school at alarming rates. Even showing evidence of the achievement gap does little to preclude schools from blaming students and the background of their families.

In some settings, I have noticed a collective defensiveness that envelops the room when we attempt these discussions. People seem much more willing to empathize with the children in Jonathan Kozol's books (e.g., 1985, 1992). It appears much more difficult to believe that these kinds of things may actually be occurring in their districts, their schools, or even in their classrooms. We must face the reality that from all vantage points, schools are failing minority and poor children.

Criticisms of High-Stakes Accountability Systems

School reform efforts are sorely needed to respond to the educational plight of minority and poor children. In light of the persistent underachievement of these students, the urgency to raise academic standards is certainly understandable. However, less understandable is the aim to raise standards by focusing on high-stakes test scores. Given the concerns raised regarding such standardized testing movements, school leaders are cautioned to consider the negative impact this movement has on their most vulnerable consumers, children from poor and minority backgrounds.

National accountability movements have been criticized on several fronts. Terms such as "high-stakes testing" (Thurlow & Johnson, 2000) are commonly used to convey the consequences meted out to those who perform below pre-set standards. The validity of standardized achievement tests has been questioned. In fact, it has even been suggested that some tests not only fail to measure what they purport to measure, but assess standards that are

surprisingly low (Hilliard, 2000). Other concerns center around the mismatch between curricula and tests, which are commercially developed. Hilliard suggests that the overlap between standardized tests and school curricula is often 50 percent. Thus, some tests may only measure half of a school's curricular content. This curricular misalignment frequently leads to teachers' abandoning their curricula and primarily "teaching to the test" (Kohn, 2000). In the end, both the relevance and utility of standardized tests are suspect.

When standardized tests are used with minority and poor children, the risk of negative effects multiplies. Test bias continues to be raised as a concern when students who are not dominant culture or social class members are tested In addition, other factors contribute to less reliable results. For example, testing conditions, students' relationships with test administrators, and students' anxiety levels regarding the testing situation can influence students' performance on standardized tests.

These concerns overshadow the intent of school reform initiatives that claim to raise standards and emphasize accountability. In spite of mounting criticisms, the stakes are getting even higher for minority and poor children in many school districts at both the individual and schoolwide level. For example, students are tested under an umbrella of threats — failing to pass can result in grade-level retention or even the denial of a high school diploma. As has been true for years, students' test performance can actually result in students being removed from general education programming and placed them in remedial or special education classes (Thurlow & Johnson, 2000). Although these consequences affect students across ethnic backgrounds and income levels, they disproportionately affect minority and poor children. Those learners who have historically experienced these negative outcomes are at greater risk for the undesirable consequences of high-stakes testing. As a group, they are not likely to fare well on standardized tests and, as a result, will suffer the consequences associated with "below standard" test performance.

When school reform involves high-stakes, high-pressure testing, attention must be focused on the self-esteem of students and their families. Pressure is exerted on the entire school when a percentage of the student body scores below certain standards and, as a result, is labeled as "low performing" and/or assigned a grade of D or F — a situation many schools that serve ethnic minority or poor children find themselves in. For example, when the administrators of two Florida schools that received F's were interviewed, they discussed the stigma associated with receiving failing school report card grades (Associated Press, 2000). The schools' highly publicized classifications had a negative effect on all stakeholders — students, families, faculty, staff, and administrators. During children's school careers, they encounter many experiences that help shape their individual and collective self-esteem. When whole schools are labeled as schools that are performing poorly or are given a below-average letter grade, students, their families, and the community are stigmatized. In addition to the negative messages given to those stakeholders, their self- and ethnic identities may be at stake. If the vast majority of schools characterized as low or poor performing are comprised of ethnic minority and impoverished children, those children invariably get the message that school achievement — and, thus, their own success — is unattainable.

Directly related to the increased pressure for school districts to raise their test scores is the narrowing of the curriculum that occurs when students are only taught the subjects that appear on the tests (Gall, Jones, & Hardin, 2000). Stated another way, teachers have reported being forced to give short shrift to subjects such as science, social studies, and the arts when testing focuses on reading, writing, and mathematics.

Some segments of school populations (e.g., students with disabilities) have been excluded from schoolwide testing. It has even been reported that students who school leaders thought would do poorly on standardized tests have been placed in instructional arrangements that exempt them from those tests.

The Florida Department of Education recently awarded money to schools (approximately $100 per student) when they raise their school report card grades. For instance, a school that received a C one year and an A the next year receives a hefty check as a reward for their "improvement." Some of the checks were even delivered by the Governor. Among other things, the money could be spent to hire additional staff to continue their academic gains or to grant staff bonuses. One school used its money to award $1,000 bonuses to the faculty and staff. As well intended as that may be, the pressures mount even more to improve test scores. Most problematic is the concern that as school personnel are increasingly pressured, the temptation to teach to the test increases. Many schools maintain such a strong curricular focus on "the test" that they are analogous to test preparation centers (Kohn, 2000).

Parents and teachers have complained that their students are denied enrichment opportunities and experiences if school administrators do not believe those experiences will be covered by the test. It appears that test preparation to raise scores trumps effective teaching. Of equal concern are the instructional approaches used to teach content that will be on the test. As a result of beliefs that large numbers of minority and poor youth need remediation to be successful on tests, these students tend to be taught using direct instruction and drill and practice (Kaiser, 2000). Large-scale adoption of these approaches reduces the opportunities students have to engage in higher order thinking skills and promotes the acquisition of basic-level knowledge.

Strategies for Developing Culturally Responsive School Leadership

As pressures mount to raise test scores, teachers and school leaders are becoming more hesitant to critique their own policies and practices. But we must be willing to critique ourselves to ensure that ethical decision-making is at the heart of standards-based school reform. School policies and practices should not privilege some citizens, while alienating others. If school leaders do not engage in reflective leadership, they will remain educational connoisseurs. Much like we do fine wine, great food, or divine chocolate, Eisner (1998) suggests that educational connoisseurs privately appreciate and discern the qualities of the teaching experience.

According to Eisner, educational *criticism* is what gives our *connoisseurship* a public presence. In other words, Eisner believes that educational connoisseurship is the art of appreciation, while educational criticism is the art of disclosure. Criticism provides us with

insights on educational practices. School leaders and teachers must move beyond educational connoisseurship and not be hesitant to engage in educational criticism.

As educational critics, we must first dispel the myths and negative images surrounding certain children and youth — urban children, poor children, African American children, and Hispanic children. The mere mention of an urban school conjures up such disparaging images. People often mistakenly believe that these children learn best with a great deal of structure and firmness and thus may go overboard in their use of techniques that center on controlling youngsters. (Again, they mistakenly think that schools are not effective unless they use a curriculum of control.)

The cultural divide between school personnel and their students must also be acknowledged. We can no longer assume that the strategies and methods we used in the past as teachers and administrators will continue to hold sway with today's children and youth. A few years ago, I spent a year in a predominately African American, low-income elementary school. I learned some valuable lessons. During the first few weeks, I merely sat in the back of the room with a laptop computer and took copious notes. I was trying to understand what school was like for those fifth grade students and hoped to be able to conduct site-based teacher education. The teacher was a first-year European American teacher who invited me into her classroom because she wanted to learn more about her students' cultures. Bless her heart.

While I was sitting in the back of the room, I became a master teacher of those children — or, shall I say, a master armchair teacher. I was quick to find occasions when I felt she should have used a different approach with her students. So I jotted those down. What bothered me most of all was the time it took her to walk the students anywhere — to the lunchroom, the library, the gym, anywhere. She would start and stop the line every time students talked on their way to their destination. It seemed to literally take forever.

I kept taking notes about the amount of time they wasted just in transition. I thought of all kinds of wonderful ways to get them where they needed to be much more efficiently. Then one day, I had my chance. The teacher had to make an important phone call, so I volunteered to walk the children to the lunchroom. It must have taken us 20 minutes. As soon as I got the front of the line ready, students at the end of the line cut up, and vice versa. I used all the techniques I used in my own classrooms — to no avail. And these were the same strategies I was teaching my university students to use. I decided then and there that I must always socially validate my teaching to ensure that it is current, effective, and culturally responsive.

Our interactions with culturally diverse learners can be validated in several ways. Their communities can be a source of much learning. The students in that fifth grade classroom were having a difficult time getting along. They were frequently upset with the teacher. She was upset with them. And they were often upset with one another. There was a good bit of arguing and name-calling.

One day, an African storyteller came to the school and spoke to each classroom. I noticed those fifth graders were most attentive. He demonstrated each of the Kwanzaa principles for them and talked about our African ancestry. They were quite taken with the third Kwanzaa

principle in particular — Ujima, which means collective work and responsibility. He told them that it meant having each other's back. I found out that their classroom rules plastered on the walls meant nothing to them. They did not keep hands, feet, and objects to themselves. But when you said, "Now, remember, you have each other's back," that took on great meaning. I learned that culturally responsive classroom management was far more effective and meaningful. The traditional classroom codes were simply decorations on the wall with which no one complied.

There are other ways to address diversity-related issues in schools. One particularly effective way is to diversify the faculty and staff. When Dr. Mary Poplin of Claremont Graduate University visited with us, she pointed out that university classrooms cannot engage in conversations about diversity unless there is a critical mass of ethnic minority students in classes. The same is true for schools. It is difficult to understand some of the issues and concerns without a critical mass of teachers who all too often are underrepresented in the teaching force. Anything less and voices are silenced and multiple perspectives are not honored.

I have found that it is not difficult to create a critical mass of even the most underrepresented individuals — African American men — to prepare them for urban teaching careers. In the department of special education at the University of South Florida, we have had three initiatives that prepare African American men and other underrepresented groups to teach urban children with disabilities. The first initiative, Project PILOT — Preparing Innovative Leaders of Tomorrow — was developed in 1996. Since that time, 31 African American men have graduated from this program and assumed teaching positions.

These African American men have changed the complexion of many of our classes and, in some instances, our teaching. In my clinical teaching class where these men composed almost half of the class, I could not spout off teaching methods that used to work with urban children and children from low-income families. I like to think they kept my teaching "real." You see, many of those men are not too far removed from those settings. In fact, when they work with African American boys in their field experiences, they often report seeing themselves. They bring different perspectives into our classroom discussions.

When I taught them about reading strategies, for example, they wanted to know how those strategies would work with readers who had far more pressing matters on their minds, like survival. And when I demonstrated and discussed social skill instruction, they quickly reminded me that many social skill steps have little relevance when those children are in their communities.

There has been much discussion about the widening gap between teachers and their students, especially when there are ethnic differences. I realize more and more that a divide can exist even when teachers and their students are from similar ethnic backgrounds. There are generational differences that also come into play.

Barrick, one of the PILOT men who taught in an urban charter school, was quite excited one day. He had been working with his class on words with short vowel sounds. One student in particular just was not catching on. Barrick asked the students to think of words with the short vowel sound. One student said, "pig." Barrick said, "That's right." Another student said, "hid."

Barrick said, "That's right." The little boy who was having the difficulty said, "I know, I know." When he was called upon, he said, "jit." Barrick said at first he was going to remind the student that that was not a word. But then it dawned on him — for that young man, it is a word. "Jit" is short for "jitterbug," and in the popular lexicon of some youth, it is used to refer to youngsters. How many of us would have asked him to come up with another "word" instead.

Having African American men in my class also helped me better understand some of the students who are most at odds with the school system. I am talking about those who come to school full of rage and hopelessness. Many of them readily identify with rap lyrics in which themes of gangster lifestyles and death are common. Many of these students, particularly young men, feel quite alienated and sorely seek and demand respect at all costs. A colleague and I developed a "Behind the Schoolhouse Door" project where we went into the projects of West Tampa, Florida. We talked to several young men to find out what school was like for them. We heard over and over that they wanted to feel respected and cared about. One young man looked at us and said that he wanted to be the teacher's pet just once. He said that all his life he has wanted that experience. Experiences like those help us get to know, understand, and affirm the incredible gifts, talents, and uniqueness that students bring to school settings.

Another strategy involves focusing on effective teaching, instead of allowing tests to drive curricula and teacher-student interactions. School administrators can replace their preoccupation with test scores with a focus on quality teaching (Hilliard, 2000). Thus, staff development could center on raising teachers' expectations of low-income and minority students, enhancing critical thinking skills, developing culturally responsive pedagogy (Franklin, 1992), involving students' families and communities (Townsend, 1994), and cultivating transformational leadership, or the ability to develop leadership among others (Williams, in press).

All aspects of school leadership should reflect an explicit commitment to improving outcomes for culturally diverse learners. It becomes a moral imperative as school districts promote high-stakes testing with minority and poor young people. Granted, it appears that high-stakes testing will continue to be the centerpiece of many school reform efforts for a while longer. With the demographic shifts occurring in public education, more students of color will be subjected to its consequences. With such external pressure, school leaders are cautioned to constantly reflect on and critique their schools' policies and practices to ensure equitable treatment and outcomes for minority and poor children. They also are encouraged to increase the diversity among their faculty and staff and seek to understand and affirm cultural and individual differences. So much of the blame for students' poor outcomes is directed at students and their families. More emphasis must be put on effective teaching, rather than on standardized tests (Hilliard, 2000). School-university partnerships can ensure that reciprocal relationships are established where schools have opportunities to inform teacher education programs. Staff development must take on a new face to address key standards-based school reform issues relative to youth from minority and impoverished backgrounds. When effective leadership and teaching of schools' most disenfranchised students occur, perhaps "Mother May I?" will be just another fun childhood game that has absolutely nothing to do with schools.

Discussion Questions

1. What are the major criticisms of high-stakes assessments relative to ethnic minority and poor learners?

2. Describe strategies for enhancing the schooling of culturally and linguistically diverse children and youth.

3. If you were charged to assist with the planning of your school district's reform initiative, what cultural considerations would you insist upon to ensure high standards and expectations for diverse learners while ensuring that the initiative does, "no harm?"

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CHAPTER THREE

INCLUDING SPECIAL NEEDS STUDENTS IN STANDARDS-BASED ASSESSMENTS

by

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ABSTRACT

Including students with disabilities in state and district assessments is now required by law. Still, there are several challenges to address to fulfill the intent of the legal mandate to ensure that students with disabilities have access to the general curriculum and the benefits of reaching high standards. Among the challenges are high-stakes testing, resistance to accommodations, denial of responsibility, and an array of "gray area" issues. This paper suggests strategies for overcoming the barriers to including students with disabilities in standards-based assessments.

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INTRODUCTION

Assessing students is one of the more public and controversy-provoking aspects of standards-based reform. Not only are students required to meet high standards, but they are required to demonstrate that they have done so on large-scale assessments taken by "all" students in a district or state. More and more, the consequences of not doing well on these assessments are significant — students may be held back a grade, be required to attend summer school, or be denied a diploma simply based on their test performance. On the other hand, the consequences of doing well have been ratcheted up. Some students who perform well earn scholarships, awards, and other benefits that did not exist before the push to meet higher standards.

Educators are directly affected by standards-based reforms and the increased emphasis on student assessment. In fact, it might be said that at times, they are held hostage to the performance of their students on large-scale assessments. Sometimes this situation plays out in consequences for the schools themselves, for example when schools are placed on a probation

list or denied rewards that schools with higher performing students earn. Sometimes it plays out in consequences for administrators, who may fail to earn an increase in salary or may even lose their jobs. More recently, there is increasing conversation among politicians, in particular, about whether to hold individual teachers accountable for the performance of the students assigned to their classrooms.

Many educators are disturbed by the path that standards-based reform has taken when it comes to student assessments, particularly when it comes to including special needs students in these assessments. When students with disabilities are added to the mix, especially if they are English Language Learners, cries of unfairness are heard far and wide. Yet some think that including these students in standards-based assessments is a logical solution to ensuring that students with disabilities benefit from standards-based reforms. Some believe this is the *only* way to do so, an argument recently supported by the passage of legislation requiring that these students be included in state and district large-scale assessments and that their performance be reported. Thus, it is a perfect time to determine how to successfully include *all* students, including students with disabilities and those who are gifted and talented, in standards-based assessments.

The intent of this paper is to offer strategies for successfully including students with disabilities and students who are gifted and talented in standards-based assessments. This paper includes a description of a fully inclusive assessment system, followed by a discussion of critical issues that are barriers to the successful participation of special needs students in the assessments of standards-based systems. This discussion is followed by specific suggestions for ways to overcome these barriers. Finally, specific strategies are offered for ensuring the success of special needs students in assessments.

Characteristics Of Fully Inclusive Standards-Based Assessments

To understand the nature of a fully inclusive assessment system, it helps to step back and look at the way most national, state, and district assessments were conducted just 10 years ago. McGrew, Thurlow, and Spiegel (1993) were among the first to look at national assessments for data on students with disabilities, only to find that those data were not available — primarily because students with disabilities had not been included in the assessments in the first place. Ingels (1993, 1996; Ingels & Scott, 1993) notes that the tendency was to exclude these students from national longitudinal samples, even though educators were instructed to include them.

Similar findings have emerged in relation to state assessments (Shriner & Thurlow, 1992), local assessments (Zlatos, 1994), and other national assessments, such as the National Assessment of Educational Progress (Olson & Goldstein, 1997). In many cases, the picture of who has been included in assessments is quite murky. Some state personnel have indicated that many students with disabilities probably were included in assessments, but no one really kept track of how many. In addition, there were reports of students being encouraged to not participate in assessments. For example, some students were being sent on field trips on the day of the district test; in other cases, principals called parents to suggest that their child stay home

because the test was not really relevant for the child or he or she would be frustrated or emotionally traumatized by participating ("Why Johnny Stayed Home," 1997).

After the initial stories of blatantly "exempting" students with disabilities from tests emerged, more systematic information soon became available. For example, when researchers Thurlow, Ysseldyke, and Silverstein (1995) examined state assessment policies and guidelines, they found that only a handful of states actually addressed students with disabilities. States varied widely in the extent to which they encouraged the participation of students with disabilities in tests or the reporting of their scores. Many states had accommodation policies that conflicted — what one state recommended as an accommodation was prohibited in another (Thurlow, Scott, & Ysseldyke, 1995). This variability was also true of national assessments designed to provide an equivalent measure across the nation of how students were doing in various content areas (National Academy of Education, 1992, 1993). For example, the validity of longitudinal trends maintained by the National Assessment of Educational Progress was compromised by varying participation rates of students with disabilities across the nation, which in turn, were related to state accommodation policies.

Variability in the participation rates of special needs students and in the accommodations they were allowed to use in standards-based assessments suggested that there were many ways in which assessment systems were not fully inclusive. For example, it seemed likely that state guidelines about who should participate in state assessments did not require the participation of all students. Similarly, variability in accommodations policies probably reflected differences in views about the need to include all students and differences in the nature of the assessments themselves. Striving toward a fully inclusive assessment system is a goal for several reasons (Thurlow, Elliott, & Ysseldyke, 1998):

1. For an accurate picture of education
2. For students with disabilities to benefit from reforms
3. To make accurate comparisons
4. To avoid unintended consequences of exclusion
5. To meet legal requirements
6. To promote high expectations

All of these reasons have been discussed in great detail by Thurlow, Elliott, and Ysseldyke (1998), as well as by others who recognize the difficulties created when groups of students are singled out to not participate in state and district assessments.

Fully inclusive standards-based assessments have several common characteristics. These relate to a number of factors, including (1) how participation decisions are made, (2) the nature of allowable accommodations, (3) the availability of an alternate assessment, and, ultimately, (4) how scores are aggregated and reported.

Participation decisions. According to the National Center on Educational Outcomes (Elliott, Thurlow, & Ysseldyke, 1996), inclusive participation policies are those that specify that decisions about participation should be based on objective criteria and involve those who know the student, the student's educational goals, and the nature of the instruction the student received.

In addition, good participation policies are not based on irrelevant factors, such as the student's category of disability, the setting in which the student receives instruction, or the amount of time that the student spends in the general classroom or resource room. Decisions should be made about participation in the regular assessment, in the regular assessment with accommodations, or in an alternate assessment. Finally, there is a need to document the decisions that are made for students with disabilities and the reasons these decisions were made. A translation of these characteristics into criteria that can be used by local decision makers is provided in Table 1.

TABLE 1. PARTICIPATION POLICY CRITERIA

- Decision makers start from the premise that all students, including all students with disabilities, are to participate in the accountability system and, to the extent possible, in the regular assessment.
- Decisions are made by people who know the student, including the student's strengths and weaknesses.
- Decision makers take into account the student's instructional goals, current level of functioning, and learning characteristics.
- The student's program setting, category of disability, or percentage of time in the classroom does *not* influence the decision.
- The student is included in any part of the test for which the student receives *any* instruction, regardless of where the instruction occurs.
- Before a decision is made to have a student participate in an alternate assessment, decision makers reconfirm that only 1% to 2% of all students in their district or state are in the alternate assessment.
- Parents are informed of participation options and about the implications of their child *not* being included in a particular test of in the accountability system. They are encouraged to contribute to the decision-making process.
- The decision is written on the student's IEP, or on an additional form attached to the IEP, and the reasons for the decision is documented.

Source: From *Testing Students with Disabilities: Practical Strategies for Complying with District and State Requirements* (p. 24), by M. Thurlow, J. Elliott, and J. Ysseldyke, 1998, Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press. Criteria reprinted with permission.

Inclusive participation policies reflect most of the new requirements in the 1997 amendments to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA 97), which requires:

> IN GENERAL — Children with disabilities are included in general state and district-wide assessment programs, with appropriate accommodations, where necessary. As appropriate, the state or local educational agency

(1) develops guidelines for the participation of children with disabilities *in alternate assessments* for those children who cannot participate in State and district-wide assessment programs; and
(2) develops and, beginning not later than July 1, 2000, conducts *those alternate assessments*. [PL 105-17, Section 612 (a)(17)]

Participation in large-scale assessments generally is considered to be directly affected by characteristics of the test, such as the extent to which the test covers a broad range of skills. However, participation also is affected by policies that deal with the use of accommodations during testing.

Accommodations. Accommodations are changes in the way a test is administered, changes in the materials used, or changes in the way in which a student responds. Much controversy surrounds the use of many accommodations (see Critical Issues section). Still, there is a need to delineate how decisions about accommodations should be made.

The National Center on Educational Outcomes has identified guiding principles for accommodation policies (Elliott et al., 1996) that are similar to guidelines for participation policies. Table 2 translates these characteristics into criteria that can be used by local decision makers.

TABLE 2. ACCOMMODATION POLICY CRITERIA

- Decisions are made by people who know the student, including the student's strengths and weaknesses.
- Decision makers consider the student's learning characteristics and the accommodations currently used during classroom instruction and classroom testing.
- The student's category of disability or program setting does not influence the decision.
- The goal is to identify accommodations that the student is using in the classroom during instruction and in classroom testing situations; new accommodations should not be introduced for the district or statewide assessment.
- The decision is made systematically, using a form that lists questions to answer or variables to consider in making the accommodations decision. On this form, the decision about recommended accommodations and the reasons for the decision are documented.
- Parents (or students at an appropriate age) are involved in the decision by either participating in the decision making process or at least being given the analysis of the need for accommodations and by signing the form that indicates accommodations that are to be used.
- The decision is documented on the student's IEP.

Source: From *Testing Students with Disabilities: Practical Strategies for Complying with District and State Requirements* (p. 24), by M. Thurlow, J. Elliott, and J. Ysseldyke, 1998, Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press. Criteria reprinted with permission.

IDEA 97 does not address accommodations other than to indicate that they are an element of participation in state- and district-wide assessments. In fact, no definition is provided of what constitutes an accommodation. Furthermore, the word "modification" is sometimes used instead of or along with "accommodations."

Alternate assessments. The requirement that states and districts develop and implement alternate assessments for students with disabilities who are unable to participate in general state- and district-wide assessments took effect July 1, 2000. Little guidance has been provided for the alternate assessments, other than that provided in the Analysis of Comments and Changes that accompanied the regulations for IDEA 97:

> If IEP teams properly make individualized decisions about the participation of each child with a disability in general State or district-wide assessments, including the use of appropriate accommodations, and modifications in administration (including individual modifications, as appropriate), it should be necessary to use alternate assessments for a relatively small percentage of children with disabilities.
>
> Alternate assessments need to be aligned with the general curriculum standards set for all students and should not be assumed appropriate only for those students with significant cognitive impairments. (From Final regulations for the Amendments to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. P.L. 105-17 [1997]. Participation in Assessments, Discussion, p. 12564.)

Still, two months before the July deadline, states had generated many different forms of alternate assessments (Thompson & Thurlow, 2000), which varied in nearly every aspect possible — from eligibility criteria, to standards assessed, to measurement procedures used, to how the results would be scored, aggregated, and reported. This variability indicates that more clarification is needed about the parameters of alternate assessments.

Reporting. Reporting is another aspect of assessments that affects the extent to which the assessment system fully includes all students. Elliott et al. (1996) describe several characteristics of inclusive reporting policies. These characteristics are translated into criteria for local decision makers in Table 3.

IDEA 97 gives considerable attention to the issue of reporting scores. Specifically, the law notes:

> REPORTS — The state educational agency makes available to the public, and reports to the public with the same frequency and in the same detail as it reports on the assessment of nondisabled children, the following:
>
> (1) The number of children with disabilities participating in regular assessments.
> (2) The number of those children participating in *alternate assessments.*
> (3)(I) The performance of those children on regular assessments (beginning not later than July 1, 1998) and on *alternate assessments* (not later than July 1, 2000), if

doing so would be statistically sound and would not result in the disclosure of performance results identifiable to individual children.

(II) Data relating to the performance of children described under Subclause I shall be disaggregated

(aa) for assessments conducted after July 1, 1998; and

(bb) for assessments conducted before July 1, 1998, if the State is required to disaggregate such data prior to July 1, 1998. [PL 105-17, Section 612 (a)(17)]

The Analysis of Comments and Changes to the regulations includes the following comments:

> In order to ensure that students with disabilities are fully included in the accountability benefits of State and district-wide assessments, it is important that the State include results for children with disabilities whenever the State reports results for other children. When a State reports data about State or district-wide assessments at the district or school level for nondisabled children, it also must do the same for children with disabilities. Section 300.139 requires that each state aggregate the results of children who participate in alternate assessments with results for children who participate in the general assessment, unless it would be inappropriate to aggregate such scores.

As indicated by the law and the Analysis, the key requirements of reporting relate not just to public disclosure of the participation and performance of students with disabilities, but also to combining their scores with those of students without special needs.

TABLE 3. REPORTING POLICY CRITERIA

- A written policy exists about who is included when calculating participation or exclusion rates.
- Rates of exclusion that are specific to students with disabilities, and reasons for the exclusion, are reported when assessment results are reported.
- Data reports include information from all test takers.
- Records are kept so that data for students with disabilities could be reported separately, overall, or by other breakdowns.
- Parents are informed about the reporting policy for their child's data.

Source: From *Testing Students with Disabilities: Practical Strategies for Complying with District and State Requirements* (p. 92–93), by M. Thurlow, J. Elliott, and J. Ysseldyke, 1998, Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press. Criteria reprinted with permission.

Critical Issues/Barriers

In the past, issues surrounding the inclusion of students with disabilities in large-scale assessments were treated primarily by addressing individual aspects of an inclusive standards-based assessment system — participation decisions, accommodations, the alternate assessment, and the aggregation and reporting of scores (see, e.g., Elliott, Thurlow, Ysseldyke, & Erickson, 1997; Erickson, Ysseldyke, Thurlow, & Elliott, 1997; Thurlow et al., 1998; Thurlow, Olsen, Elliott, Ysseldyke, Erickson, & Ahearn, 1996; Thurlow, Ysseldyke, Erickson, & Elliott, 1997). Since IDEA 97, for the most part, a related but new generation of critical issues has emerged; these issues serve as major barriers to fully inclusive standards-based assessments.

Four broad issues are particularly important for standards-based assessments. Unless these issues are solved, the backlash against including all students with disabilities in standards-based assessments may create an insurmountable barrier. The issues include high-stakes assessments, resistance to accommodations, denial of responsibility, and a variety of "gray area" issues.

High-stakes assessments. All standards-based assessments have some kind of consequences attached to them, from publicly reporting scores to determining whether a student will graduate from school or a principal will be fired. The consequences are typically referred to as the "stakes," and various tests are designated as "high-stakes" or "low-stakes" tests. Of course, the distinction is not as clear as this sounds. Tests that policymakers consider low stakes (e.g., NAEP) may turn out to have much higher stakes as the media use the results to compare states, for example.

Accountability has been defined as the "systematic collection, analysis, and use of information to hold schools, educators, and others responsible for the performance of students and the education system" (Education Commission of the States, 1998, p. 3). It is best to distinguish between system accountability and student accountability when discussing high stakes as a barrier to the full inclusion of students with disabilities in standards-based assessments.

System accountability refers to situations in which the consequences of students' performance are applied to any aspect of the system — districts, schools, school staff members, administrators, or teachers. Common examples of these are the Kentucky system, where schools receive rewards for improved student performance, and the Texas system, where awards are available, but principals may also lose their jobs if performance remains low. Maryland, Kentucky, and a number of other states designate schools as "reconstitution eligible," "in crisis," and a variety of other designations to indicate that they are not doing well and may be re-staffed, taken over by the state, or a variety of other actions. According to a recent study by the Education Commission of the States (1999), most states have fairly significant consequences for various parts of the education system — more have negative consequences in either state statute or regulations (n = 35) than have positive consequences (n = 17).

Student accountability refers to situations in which the consequences for performance are applied to individual students. The most common examples of these are graduation exams and

exams used to make promotion decisions (from one grade to the next or from one level of schooling to the next (e.g., middle school to high school). There are other kinds of consequences used, however. For example, several states have passed — or attempted to pass — laws that link driver's licenses to performance in school or on tests (Johnston, 1996).

Both system accountability and student accountability create barriers for inclusive standards-based assessments. When the system is held accountable for students' performance, there typically is a push to not include students with disabilities and other students considered to be low performing. Recent analyses of data in state education reports (Thurlow, Nelson, Teelucksingh, & Ysseldyke, 2000) confirm that as a group, students with disabilities generally perform below other students, regardless of the type of test, the grade level, or the content of the test. Even though all states have not yet disaggregated the test performance data of students with disabilities, those that have present a consistent picture of low performance. Thus, educators who have to suffer significant negative consequences, or who might lose the opportunity to receive significant positive consequences, are hesitant to include the scores of students with disabilities. For example, Allington and McGill-Franzen (1992) found that students were not passed into the testing grade level or were assigned to special education classes (where scores did not count), so that school scores were higher than they would have been had all students been included.

Student accountability also creates a significant barrier to fully inclusive standards-based assessments. Generally, however, those who resist inclusion for this reason are parents and advocates. Their resistance stems from a concern that students with disabilities make up the bulk of students who will be retained in grade or who will not receive a standard high school diploma if they must pass a state- or district-developed standards-based test. Unfortunately, we still know very little about what is actually happening for students with disabilities in states with recent or impending policies to halt social promotion (Quenemoen, Lehr, Thurlow, Thompson, & Bolt, 2000).

However, more information is available about graduation exams and how students with disabilities are included or given special considerations (Guy, Shin, Lee, & Thurlow, 1999). Twenty states now have high-stakes consequences for students; many other states may soon have similar policies (American Federation of Teachers, 1999). Yet, students with disabilities may or may not be held to the same standards as other students (Thurlow & Johnson, 2000). In an excellent report developed for the National Research Council, Heubert and Hauser (1999) address the inappropriateness of holding students accountable for reaching the standards assessed in graduation exams before the system has been held accountable for providing the experiences that students need.

Thus, high-stakes assessments still pose significant barriers to a fully inclusive standards-based system. As more and more states and districts attach higher and higher stakes to assessments, there is more and more resistance to being held accountable for the performance of students with disabilities. Educators and administrators do not want to be held accountable for their performance. Parents, advocates, and students with disabilities do not want to be held accountable for students' passing tests when they think that the system has not provided the educational experiences students need to pass the test, when needed accommodations are not

provided, and when they think the tests assess a student's disability rather than students' knowledge and skills. Assessment results, they argue, are colored by the effect of the disability.

Resistance to accommodations. As noted earlier, accommodations play a key role in ensuring that students have access to standards-based assessments. Despite the general agreement that some students need accommodations, considerable controversy continues about their use during assessments. A common principle is that assessment accommodations should be aligned with classroom accommodations (thus, the importance of the classroom teacher's involvement in the IEP team process for students who need accommodations).

Concern has arisen about whether teachers have been trained to determine what classroom accommodations individual students need (Elliott & Thurlow, 2000; Shriner, Kim, Thurlow, & Ysseldyke, 1993). Further, not all classroom accommodations are considered appropriate for standards-based assessments. For example, although reading printed text to a student may be appropriate while teaching that student to read, it is generally agreed that it is an inappropriate accommodation when attempting to assess the student's reading skills during standards-based assessments.

All states now have written policies about the use of accommodations during assessments (Thurlow, House, Boys, Scott, & Ysseldyke, 2000). Typically, the policies list which accommodations students may use, often with the recognition that students may need other accommodations that are not specifically listed in the guidelines. In addition, states typically provide a list of accommodations that are not approved for the state assessment.

In the early 1990s, only some 20 states had written policies on assessment accommodations (McGrew, Thurlow, Shriner, & Spiegel, 1992; Thurlow, Ysseldyke, & Silverstein, 1993). Although the types of accommodations listed varied greatly across the states, the same types of accommodations consistently created the greatest controversy. Some states allowed them; others did not. Accommodations that determined how tests were presented to the student were the most controversial in the early 1990s and have continued to create the greatest controversy ever since (Thurlow, House, Boys, Scott, & Ysseldyke, 2000; Thurlow, Scott, & Ysseldyke, 1995; Thurlow, Seyfarth, Scott, & Ysseldyke, 1997).

During the early 1990s, there was little research on the use of accommodations during standards-based assessments (although there was a general body of older literature on test changes; see Tindal & Fuchs, 1999). With new funding from the U.S. Department of Education, research is now being conducted on assessment accommodations. These studies range from large-scale research involving hundreds or even thousands of test takers, to small-scale studies involving fewer than 100 subjects, to single-subject research designs (e.g., Anderson, Jenkins, & Miller, 1996; Mazzeo, Carlson, Voelkl, & Lutkus, 2000; Tindal, Heath, Hollenbeck, Almond, & Harniss, 1998; Tindal, Helwig, & Hollenbeck, 1999). The goal of most of the research is to examine the effects of various accommodations on score validity and comparability, in order to develop a research basis for policy making. Recently, CTB/McGraw-Hill (2000), a major test publisher, suggested that research is not needed on all accommodations. In its description of levels of accommodation, CTB/McGraw-Hill clarified that there are numerous accommodations that do not diverge significantly from standard testing conditions, and suggested that scores from

tests administered with these accommodations simply be aggregated with standard scores without research evidence of score comparability.

The burst of research activity surrounding accommodations is encouraging for at least two reasons. First, it will clarify which accommodations are or are not appropriate to use during testing; second, it draws the attention of practitioners and decision makers to the needs of students with disabilities. Still, the controversy over accommodations and the view that accommodations give students with disabilities an unfair advantage permeates discussions. Attempts to define the best research design (Thurlow, McGrew, Tindal, Thompson, Ysseldyke, & Elliott, 2000) have not been completely successful (see Fuchs, Fuchs, Eaton, Hamlett, & Karns, in press; Phillips, 1993; Tindal, 1998), and there remains a concern about students being "over-accommodated" (Elliott & Thurlow, 2000). It is likely that the courtroom will be the place where many accommodations issues play out, especially when high-stakes assessments are involved (Shriner, 2000).

Denial of responsibility. The argument that the responsibility for educating students with disabilities rests with special educators has long pervaded the education field (Ysseldyke, Algozzine, & Thurlow, 2000). To some extent, this viewpoint reflects some of the " take charge" approach taken by special educators following the enactment of the Public Law 94-142, then known as the Education of All Handicapped Children Act (EHCA). Children were quickly identified and then bustled out of the general education classroom into special classes and resource rooms. Services were expanded to cover preschool children and students transitioning from school to work or post-secondary education. Only later, as EHCA transformed into IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act), was it recognized that youngsters with disabilities needed to be part of the education setting and have access to the general education curriculum (e.g., McGregor & Vogelsberg, 1998). Persuading policymakers, educators, and parents that this was a good idea took some time, and still has not been fully achieved (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1995).

Not including students with disabilities in the general education curriculum creates barriers to their inclusion in standards-based assessments. For one thing, educators who have no experience working with these specific students do not understand why they should be held accountable for their test scores. Further, even when students with disabilities have been placed in regular classroom settings, they often work with a special education teacher or paraprofessional, and thus classroom teachers do not feel responsible for educating these students.

Nonetheless, there are many reasons to advocate for the inclusion of all students in the accountability system. One of the primary reasons is including *all* students decreases the probability of negative unintended consequences, such as retention and referral to special education. In addition, comparisons are fairer — if comparisons are being made. It is difficult to determine whether a district that includes 40 percent of its students and boasts that 90 percent have reached standards really is superior to a district that includes 90 percent of its students and reports that 60 percent have reached standards.

When all students are included, a better picture is created of how students are doing. Some adjustments can be made for different student-body compositions (although some argue

that special adjustments are inappropriate in standards-based assessments). Not only is the picture more accurate when all students are included in the accountability system, but all students are more likely to benefit from reforms because educators are more likely to be concerned about their learning. Just five years ago, most states either were not able to identify students with disabilities in their assessment databases or simply chose not to look at their data (Elliott, Erickson, Thurlow, & Shriner, 2000). The picture today is very different (Thompson & Thurlow, 1999; Thurlow & Thompson, 1999).

"Gray area" issues. Several issues exist that are related to the failure of test developers to create assessment systems designed to include all students. Even with the development of alternate assessments, there continue to be students for whom the assessment system seems to be inappropriate. Evidence of this is the increasing number of states and districts that have found that the regular assessment is so difficult for some students with disabilities that they only earn chance-level scores. Still, the alternate assessment is not an appropriate assessment for them either because the students are learning the same content in the same way as other students in the regular assessment.

In the past, students who did not nicely fit into either the regular assessment or the alternate assessment were called "gray area students." Over time, however, it was recognized that the issue was not really a student issue, but was more a function of factors impinging on the assessment system itself (Almond, Quenemoen, Olsen, & Thurlow, 2000).

One example of a gray area issue is the perception that there need to be tests available that are below the student's current grade (Thurlow, Elliott, & Ysseldyke, 1999). Out-of-level testing has dramatically increased in the past few years, to the point where some states are specifically developing out-of-level tests for students with disabilities. Another example of a gray area issue is the concern about accommodations that are not allowed on the large-scale assessment, yet are needed to give some students access to the assessment. Use of such accommodations typically results in scores that are not reported or counted in school or district accountability systems (Thurlow & Wiener, 2000). The greater the number of students who need non-approved accommodations, the bigger the gray area issue.

Suggestions for Addressing the Issues and Overcoming Barriers

The best solution for ensuring that all students with disabilities are included in standards-based assessments is to avoid the problem in the first place. The needs of *all* students should be considered when assessments are developed and policies put in place that ensure that all students have access to the general education curriculum for a sufficient amount of time. This solution appears to be out of reach at the current time, since states have been working at break-neck speed to raise standards, focusing their attention on stiffening course requirements, and establishing accountability systems that have a greater impact on the lives of individual teachers, administrators, and students.

Recognizing that major changes in test development are slow to evolve and that the political tide toward high-stakes assessments is likely to ebb at a slow pace as well, it is important to explore other ways in which to address the issues surrounding the inclusion of

students with disabilities in standards-based assessments. The source of many of the issues lies in attitudes and beliefs. These are difficult barriers to overcome.

High-stakes assessments. It is important to address both high stakes for *systems* and high stakes for *students*, because they create slightly different barriers to including students with disabilities in standards-based assessments. Concerns about imposing accountability for students before ensuring system accountability are now well documented (Heubert & Hauser, 1999). Still, we need to address what can be done to overcome the barriers created by high-stakes testing as they now exist.

High stakes for systems create a disincentive to include students with disabilities because these students often receive the lowest scores. This has been confirmed by summaries of data from public state reports (Ysseldyke, Thurlow, Langenfeld, Nelson, Teelucksingh, & Seyfarth, (1998). However, several states now have longitudinal disaggregated data for students with disabilities. In addition, there is consistent evidence of improved performance over time (Bielinski & Ysseldyke, 2000; Trimble, 1998), suggesting that participation in standards-based assessments is beneficial to students with disabilities.

Some people think that including students with disabilities in standards-based assessments will lower scores, thus unfairly punishing those who have these students in their classrooms and buildings. There are two approaches that address this concern:

- Adjust the accountability system so that it recognizes and rewards improvements in the performance of lower performing students.

- Allow a slower phase-in period for the inclusion of the scores of students with disabilities in the system.

These approaches could also be combined to produce a system that is even more equitable for everyone.

Typical accountability systems rely on just a few indicators to determine whether the system or its constituents receive a reward (Education Commission of the States, 1999). Student performance often takes on the greatest importance in these accountability systems. Kentucky, Missouri, and a number of other states focus on raising the performance of students with disabilities by requiring that a certain percentage of students in the lowest performance level move to the next highest performance level. As a result, schools are less likely to focus their efforts only on those students who are most likely to succeed.

Slowing down the pace at which students with disabilities are brought into the system seems counter to the goal of including students with disabilities in standards-based assessments. Yet, the argument behind this strategy recognizes that these students have not been included in general education classrooms, even though they should have been. The length of the phase-in should be determined by the extent to which students have had access to the general education curriculum.

For example, in some schools, students with disabilities have complete access to the general education curriculum until they enter middle school. In order to change to an inclusive standards-based assessment system over time, schools should make the general curriculum available to sixth grade students with disabilities the first year; to sixth and seventh graders the second year; to sixth, seventh, and eighth graders the third year; and so on. Following this process, in seven years *all* K–12 students would have access to the general education curriculum and, therefore, would be included in standards-based assessments. In addition, as required by IDEA 97, assessment data for all students — including those with disabilities — should be publicly reported each year.

High-stakes assessments create problems for students and for school systems. Recent research indicates that high-stakes accountability systems increase drop-out rates and decrease the extent to which students participate in graduation ceremonies (Clarke, Haney, & Madaus, 2000; Heubert & Hauser, 1999; Lanford & Cary, 2000; Langenfeld, Thurlow, & Scott, 1997; Shepard & Smith, 1990; Thurlow & Johnson, 2000).

Determining how students with disabilities fit into current graduation requirements, particularly those that require a standards-based assessment, is difficult at best (Guy et al., 1999). Districts have taken various approaches to dealing with this issue. For example, some districts require students to obtain a passing score on such assessments in order to earn a diploma, whereas others require only that students meet their IEP goals, regardless of whether they are standards based. A further complication is whether there are other exit certificates that might be earned by students with disabilities, such as IEP diplomas or certificates of achievement, and what the implications are for students when these other exit documents are received (Thurlow & Thompson, 1999). Until we eliminate the variations in diploma options designated just for students with disabilities (Guy et al., 1999), grade promotion procedures (Quenemoen et al., 2000), and the ways in which requirements can be met (e.g., taking same test, or simply meeting IEP goals), there will continue to be controversy and confusion about students with disabilities and high-stakes assessments for them.

In discussing diploma options and other graduation issues, NCEO recommends the following (see Thurlow & Thompson, 2000):

- ***Have the same diploma options available to all students.***
  This implies that there would be no diploma option designated just for students with disabilities.

- ***Recognize that not all students demonstrate high-level knowledge and skills in the same way.***
  This means that there must be other avenues to diplomas, such as an appeals process that is available for a small number of students. (It is advisable to obtain a good estimate of the possible number of students so that whatever is proposed for them is manageable.)

- ***Give names to diploma options that correspond to the knowledge and skills demonstrated by the student.*** [Examples of names for diploma options are described in Table 4.]
  These options should recognize, but not necessarily encourage, diverse ways of demonstrating knowledge and skills . . .

- ***Clarify the implications of different diploma options for continued special education services.***
  Students with disabilities who have graduated from high school with a regular diploma may not be eligible for special education services. State and local laws vary with respect to continued special education services, so it is important to specifically define and make public these kinds of implications of diploma options policies. Defining what constitutes a "regular" diploma is an important part of the clarification.

- ***Get input from stakeholder groups about diploma options and policies.***
  Include, at a minimum, teachers, union representatives, administrators, parents, individuals with disabilities and their families, representatives from institutions of higher education, business leaders, and legislators.

- ***Use the media to explain the diploma options to the public.***
  Develop brochures for schools to give to students and to forward with transcripts to post-secondary institutions and employers explaining the meaning of the various high school diploma options that are awarded. (pp. 4–5)

Resistance to accommodations. It is clear that we have a long way to go to have the research basis needed to determine whether an accommodation changes what the test measures (e.g., does a test of *reading* comprehension that is read to a student measure listening comprehension rather than reading comprehension?) or the meaning of scores (e.g., can a score from an accommodated test be combined with scores from nonaccommodated tests?) Beyond just determining whether accommodations produce higher scores, there is a need for further discussion on the best way to conduct research to show not only that scores increase but that the scores are accurate scores. (Thurlow, McGrew, Tindal, Thompson, Ysseldyke, & Elliott, 2000). At the same time, it is clear that policy is pushing us forward, and that there is a need for a reasonable approach for dealing with "nonapproved" accommodations.

NCEO recommends that students be permitted to use non-approved accommodations. NCEO also recommends that additional evidence, such as other student work or results from performance assessments, be collected to obtain scores that can be used for reporting and accountability purposes. (Thurlow & Wiener, 2000). At the same time, however, it is recommended that states keep track of the use of such accommodations to determine whether the number of students using them is so large that questions should be raised about the appropriateness of the test or existing accommodations policies. Too large a number may also suggest a need for greater guidance or training for IEP teams.

The issue of non-approved accommodations, although important, does not solve the problem of continuing resistance to providing accommodations. People resist providing accommodations for a number of reasons. For example, some believe that students who are provided with accommodations have an unfair advantage. Some are concerned about the logistics of providing needed accommodations within the constraints of fairly rigid testing procedures that are now in place across the nation to in part curb the growing problem of cheating (see Hoff, 2000; Thurlow, Elliott, & Ysseldyke, 1998).

TABLE 4. PROPOSED EXIT DOCUMENTS

Comprehensive High School Diploma — awarded to students who complete coursework and pass the graduation test, with or without approved accommodations. There would be two other ways to earn this diploma:

> Students with IEPs could take the graduation test with a nonapproved accommodation, if they have a comprehensive and convincing body of evidence demonstrating that they had met the standards covered by the graduation test. An independent group, either in the state department or external to it, would review the evidence to make the determination. Tight criteria would need to be developed for these cases.
>
> For all students who repeatedly have not passed the graduation test, this diploma could be earned by developing a comprehensive and convincing body of evidence (including class grades, extracurricular activities, and other convincing evidence) demonstrating that they had met the standards covered by the graduation test. This avenue is similar to the *appeals process* used in some states. An independent group would review the evidence and make the determination. Tight criteria would need to be developed for these cases.

Course Completion Diploma — awarded to students who complete the required coursework, but who have not passed the graduation test (either because they had repeatedly failed the test, or because they were *exempt* from taking the test). The required coursework completed could be (a) a standard course of study, (b) an advanced course of study (including honors or Advanced Placement classes, if available), or (c) a modified course of study (including either special education courses or basic skills courses). Consideration could be given to explain the coursework completed on the diploma (e.g., Certificate of Course Completion – Advanced; Certificate of Course Completion – Standard; Certificate of Course Completion – Basic).

Certificate of Mastery — awarded to students who pass the graduation test, but who do not complete all required coursework.

Certificate of Completion — provided to students who do not pass the graduation test and do not complete coursework requirements, but who have attended school for the required number of years.

Source: Adapted from Diploma Options and Graduation Policies for Students with Disabilities, NCEO Policy Directions No. 10 (p. X), by M. L. Thurlow and S.J. Thompson, 2000, Minneapolis, MN: National Center on Educational Outcomes. Adapted table printed with permission.

These concerns can be addressed by continuing to provide examples of accommodations that individual students need, those that don't help students, and those that may become a

disadvantage if students use them who don't need them. For example, it is obvious that a student who is not blind would not benefit from a test presented in Braille; in fact, he or she would be at a disadvantage. But further, some argue that other, more general accommodations, specifically extended time and additional examples, also can be a disadvantage to students who don't need them. Therefore, careful consideration is needed to determine when these accommodations should be used and for what students.

The logistics of providing accommodations also must be addressed. Part of the problem is that over-accommodations may be occurring (Elliott, Bielinski, Thurlow, DeVito, & Hedlund, 1999; Thompson & Thurlow, 1999; Trimble, 1998), thus putting an undue burden on teachers and districts to provide accommodations. Thurlow, Elliott, and Ysseldyke (1998) suggest several ways to address the logistical issues surrounding the provision of accommodations during standards-based assessments (e.g., how to assign teachers and classrooms to those students needing accommodations); but these suggestions will not overcome the real barrier of resistance to accommodations until concerns about attitudes and giving too many accommodations to students with disabilities are also addressed.

Denial of responsibility. Denial of responsibility for students with disabilities is most flagrantly evident in the fact that the scores of students with disabilities who do participate in state and district assessments are excluded from formulas used to determine how rewards and sanctions are meted out to schools and educators (Krentz, Thurlow, & Callender, 2000). General educators do not want to be held responsible for the performance of special education students, nor do special educators. Policies and procedures that do not allow them to be excluded from either testing or accountability probably are a necessary first step. There is also a significant need for professional development about how to make good decisions about the participation of students with disabilities in assessments, how to select needed and appropriate accommodations, and how to provide appropriate instruction for all students (Elliott & Thurlow, 2000; Elmore & Rothman, 1999). Educators must begin to analyze and disaggregate data when students with disabilities are included in standards-based assessments. As Coleman (2000) notes, educators must "act on test results when faced with indications of substandard student performance" (p. 34).

Gray area issues. The move to out-of-level testing, increasing use of non-approved accommodations, and similar "gray area" issues together indicate that some students with disabilities will continue to be excluded from assessment systems simply because the assessment systems themselves are noninclusive. Almond et al. (2000), in fact, suggest that the gray areas of assessment are a direct result of five contextual factors: (a) the assumptions and other factors underlying the large-scale assessment programs; (b) the nature of standards; (c) participation and accommodations policies; (d) assessment formats; and (e) the stakes attached to the accountability system. They also recognize that gray areas are not the same everywhere. The number of issues and nature of those issues are related to the state or district context, and will therefore be different in different places. Only by beginning this identification of relevant issues and responding to them can states and districts hope to avoid the criticism that their assessment systems do not account for every student within their public education system. (p. 20)

The context in which assessments emerge (e.g., high versus low stakes, student accountability versus systems accountability) and the nature of the assessments (multiple choice versus performance based, minimal skills or high skills) is part of what makes it so difficult to provide simple and easy ways to include students with disabilities in standards-based assessments.

The use of out-of-level tests as a strategy to include more students in testing is inappropriate when the out-of-level tests are based on low expectations, when they result in students not being included in the accountability system, or whey they have the effect of "dumbing down" the instruction provided to the student. Similarly, having to rely on the use of nonapproved accommodations is not a good strategy unless policies exist to determine ways to ensure that all scores count, even those tests taken with accommodations that policymakers or test developers say change what the test measures.

The basic premise of strategies to deal with gray area issues must be to make sure that all students count, without lowering expectations or allowing other unintended consequences to occur. For example, some people have argued that assigning zero scores to students who use nonapproved accommodations is better than simply discounting their scores. Others have suggested that the scores obtained with non-approved accommodations must be viewed in light of other information and that a new score be derived by combining the various sources of information. This use of multiple measures is the notion behind an appeals process for students who have not passed high stakes tests (Thurlow & Esler, 2000).

Strategies for Ensuring Success of Students in Standards-Based Assessments

In order for students with disabilities to meet state and district standards, instruction must change. IDEA has started the discussion rolling by requiring that, to the extent appropriate, standards for students with disabilities be the same as those for other students and that students with disabilities have access to the general education curriculum.

Access to the curriculum, unfortunately, means different things to different people. Simply ensuring that all students are in the same building, or even in the same classrooms, is a very rudimentary approach. Access to the general education curriculum must mean much more. Teachers must also maintain high expectations for students with disabilities and provide additional supports if they are needed. In this context, additional supports means more than providing accommodations or classroom aides. It means, for example, building in extra time during the school day and during the summer (or, perhaps more appropriately, creating a year-round schedule) to ensure that students catch up and stay caught up with their peers. It means that students with disabilities have equal access to computers and assistive technology (an unlikely possibility according to findings presented in *Digital Divide* by Bolt and Crawford, 1999). It means that students with disabilities are taught by qualified teachers who understand the content and know how to use special instructional procedures in the classroom. It means that students with disabilities are taught to recognize the accommodations they need and how to ask for them appropriately.

It is important to ensure that appropriate instruction translates into successful standards-based instruction and supports and that instruction, in turn, translates into successful test performance. These are critical steps that must be taken to ensure that all students learn, even those we have forgotten in the past.

Including students with disabilities in standards-based assessments may be the best thing that has happened to these students since the introduction of Public Law 94-142. The inclusion of these students must be taken seriously by the entire system. When that happens, we will have reached a new era in maximizing the potential of all individuals in our school systems today.

Discussion Questions

1. In what ways can standards-based assessment systems be adjusted to facilitate the inclusion of students with disabilities?

2. What is needed to ensure that students with disabilities perform adequately on standards-based assessments?

3. What are the critical elements needed for educational systems to be accountable for the success of all students, including those with disabilities?

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CHAPTER FOUR

INCLUDING STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS IN STANDARDS-BASED REFORM: ISSUES ASSOCIATED WITH THE ALIGNMENT OF STANDARDS, CURRICULUM, AND INSTRUCTION

by

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ABSTRACT

Despite standards-based reforms, there continues to be a significant gap between the achievement of students with special needs and their middle class, majority peers. A contributing factor is that educators and policy makers have essentially ignored the changing student demography and the increasing diversity of America's classrooms as they designed and implemented standards-based reforms. This paper focuses on curriculum and instruction in discussing strategies and barriers to involving students with special needs in standards-based reform.

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INTRODUCTION

Education in the United States is characterized by national, state, and local education reform efforts aimed at improving student achievement. These efforts involve content standards that define what all students should know and be able to do, performance standards that describe student proficiency levels relative to prescribed content, and accountability systems aimed at ensuring that all students achieve high academic standards (Elmore & Fuhrman, 1994). However, despite standards-based reforms, there continues to be a significant gap between the achievement of students with special needs (e.g., students with disabilities, those from low income backgrounds, students of color, and English Language Learners) and their middle class, majority peers (Goertz, Floden, & O'Day, 1996). A contributing factor is that educators and policy makers essentially have ignored the changing student demographics and increasing diversity of America's classrooms as they have implemented standards-based reforms. For example, only half of the existing state standards clearly indicate that they apply to *all* students and a mere eight percent specify that they apply to students with disabilities (Thurlow, Ysseldyke, Gutman, & Greenen, 1998).

This paper discusses the involvement of students with special needs in standards-based reform, focusing on issues related to the alignment of curriculum and instruction. Although the primary focus is on students with disabilities, issues related to cultural and linguistic diversity are also discussed because students of color and those with limited English proficiency are disproportionately represented in remedial and special education programs. Culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) learners with disabilities are particularly disadvantaged because of their dual minority status (National Council on Disability, 1996).

The Demographic Context of Reform Activities

Between 1980 and 1990, the White population in the United States increased by 6 percent, while the number of Asian Americans increased by 108 percent, Hispanics by 53 percent, and African Americans by 13 percent (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1996). It is estimated that by the year 2010, approximately 68 percent of Americans will be people of color and that by 2050, non-Hispanic Whites will comprise 53 percent of the nation's citizenry. Contrary to popular belief, these demographic shifts are not an isolated geographic phenomenon. Every region in the country has experienced significant increases in the number of individuals from minority linguistic, ethnic, and racial backgrounds.

In 1998, almost 40 percent of the 46,792,000 public school students in grades 1 through 12 were students of color (National Center for Education Statistics, 2000). About 10 million of these students lived in households where languages other than English were spoken; 75 percent were Spanish speakers (Waggoner, 1994). Language minority students will soon represent the majority school population in more than 50 major U.S. cities (Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, 1997). This linguistic diversity is expected to continue given that 90 percent of recent immigrants come from non-English-speaking countries (Hans, Baker, & Rodriguez, 1997) and that fertility rates are higher for minority women than for White women, with Hispanics having the highest rates (Villaruel, Imig, & Kostelnik, 1995).

As a group, culturally and linguistically diverse learners experience widespread underachievement, high retention rates, and high dropout rates (Robertson, Kushner, Starks, & Drescher, 1994). Black students are more likely than their peers to be retained. Retention figures for 1995 show that the retention rate for African Americans was 18.7 percent compared to 14.7 percent for Hispanics and 12.1 percent for White students. Hispanic students, however, were more likely than their peers to drop out of school. In 1995, the status dropout rate for Hispanics between the ages of 16 and 24 was 30 percent, although the school attrition percentage differed by immigrant status. The dropout rate for foreign-born Hispanics was 46 percent, while the rate for those born in the U.S. was 18 percent (National Center for Education Statistics, 1995). Because of their poor academic performance, CLD students are likely candidates for referral to remedial and special education programs.

Students with Disabilities

In 1998, approximately 5,900,000 children and youth were served in federally supported programs for individuals with disabilities (National Center for Education Statistics, 1999). The majority of these young people were classified as mildly disabled in terms of learning disabilities, speech or language impairments, mental retardation, or emotional disturbances. Language development, reading, and mathematics were the areas most frequently targeted for special education instruction.

Almost 75 percent of 4th, 5th, and 8th grade students with disabilities who attended schools that participated in the National Assessments of Education Progress (NAEP) were performing below expected levels in reading and language arts (Mazzeo, Carlson, Voekl, & Lutkus, 2000). Approximately 44 percent of these fourth graders and 63 percent of the 12th graders receiving special education services were functioning two or more years below grade level in these skill areas. In mathematics, 24 percent of fourth graders with disabilities were two or more years below grade level, a percentage that increased to 54 percent for students in grade 12. About 40 percent of the special education students in 12th grade were receiving specialized instruction in all three of these skill areas (language arts, reading, and mathematics).

Until recently, students with disabilities were educated in segregated programs because of perceptions that the nature and severity of their disabilities required specialized programs, services, and personnel (Mallory, 1994). Now, almost half of the students in special education are mainstreamed into general education classrooms at least 80 percent of the time (Office of Special Education Programs, 1998).

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (McMillen, Kaufman, & Klein, 1995), students with disabilities are more likely to drop out of school than students who do not have disabilities (14.6% versus 11.8%). The highest rates of school attrition occur for students with mental illness (56%), followed by mental retardation (31%), serious emotional disturbances (23.6%), and learning disabilities (17.6%). Black students with disabilities are at greatest risk of dropping out of school. Like their peers, students with disabilities who have been retained are more likely to leave school.

The amendments to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1997 drew attention to the continuing problem of the overrepresentation of culturally and linguistically diverse learners in special education. Congressional findings indicate that African American students represented 16 percent of the general student population, but 21 percent of the special education population, and that African Americans were more than twice as likely to be identified by teachers as having mental retardation than were their White peers.

Congressional findings also indicate that English Language Learners (also referred to as limited-English-proficient students) pose complex challenges relative to referral, assessment, and instruction and that the services they are provided do not meet their needs (IDEA Amendments, 1997). Analysis of special education prevalence data (Robertson et al., 1994) shows that in some states, English Language Learners are underrepresented, while in other states as many as 27 percent of students with limited English proficiency are in special education programs. NAEP

assessment data indicate that in 1996, one in five fourth grade LEP students (20%) also were classified as having disabilities (Mazzeo et al., 2000). As Robertson and her colleagues (1994) observe, patterns of over- and under-identification of culturally and linguistically diverse learners in special education "not only suggest that some students are inappropriately placed in special education, but that others, who may be truly disabled, are neither being identified nor receiving the services they need and to which they are entitled" (p. 9).

Studies of referral, assessment, and placement of culturally and linguistically diverse learners in special education (e.g., Ortiz et al., 1985; Ortiz, García, Wheeler, & Maldonado-Colón, 1986) reveal that educators often mistake linguistic differences and normal difficulties in acquiring a second language for learning and/or language disabilities. Further, data gathered to inform special education decisions are inadequate for the purposes of distinguishing disabilities from linguistic and cultural differences; as a result, CLD students are inaccurately labeled as having disabilities.

Although some would argue that there is no harm in placing students who are already failing in the general education classroom into a special education classroom where they will get individualized instruction from teachers who are specially trained to remediate learning problems, there is evidence to the contrary. Wilkinson and Ortiz (1986) found that after three years of special education intervention, Hispanic students with learning disabilities had actually lost ground. Their verbal and full scale IQs were lower than they had been at initial placement, and their achievement scores were at essentially the same level they were when they entered the program. Neither general education nor special education programs adequately served the needs of these language minority students.

One explanation for the bleak outcomes of schooling for students with special needs is that although education standards typically emphasize challenging curricula and higher order skills, curricula and instructional strategies for struggling learners tend to emphasize lower level, basic skills. Under-achieving students and students with disabilities typically are removed from mainstream classrooms to receive even more intensive basic skill instruction (Elmore & Fuhrman, 1994). Instruction for these students is generally less academically oriented; objectives are lower; activities lack clear purpose and focus; textbooks and related instructional materials emphasize facts and lower level skills; and material is covered at a slower pace (Oakes, 1986). Wang, Reynolds, and Walberg (1995) suggest that this approach leaves many students at the margins.

At the margins of schools, one finds alienation, segregation and rejection — and many highly reluctant learners. These students are, for whatever reasons, struggling in their academic programs or in their social behavior; they are often at risk in their private lives and live in disordered communities. We refer, too, to students who are learning and adjusting to school life especially well, but receive far too little help; like other students, they need instruction that is adapted to their strengths. (p. 12)

Students at the margins include those with disabilities, economically disadvantaged youth, English Language Learners, and students who are suspended or expelled from school — the majority of whom are minorities. These students have one thing in common — their diversity

is correlated with a lack of school achievement. Even those students who are identified as gifted and talented fail to achieve their greatest potential because of a lack of appropriate services.

The education system makes it easy to refer students to remedial and special education programs, without determining whether the referral reflects a prejudice against the child or a failure on the school's part to meet the child's needs (Gartner, 1986). The system also offers little incentive for the prevention of school failure. A potential solution is to focus standards-based reform on students with special needs by giving greater attention to their individual needs, creating learning environments that accommodate diversity, providing training and support to increase the ability of educators to respond to diversity, and funding efforts aimed at preventing problems and designing interventions for struggling learners in general and special education programs.

Strategies for Including Students with Special Needs in Standards-Based Reform

There are at least two schools of thought relative to education standards and students with special needs. Some (e.g., Clune, 1993) argue that the diversity among students is so great that expecting all of them to achieve the same goals, in the same time frame, and at the same level of proficiency is unrealistic. For students with disabilities, who by definition require remedial instruction, there is an inherent contradiction between the principle of high academic standards for all students and the reality that students with disabilities typically require intensive, direct, basic skill instruction. Those with more severe disabilities need functional or life skills training to prepare them for independent living and the post-secondary school transition into the community and/or the labor force.

A second view is that students with special needs should have access to challenging standards and that policy makers and educators should be accountable for their performance (McDonnell, McLaughlin, & Morison, 1997; August, Hakuta, & Pompa, 1994). This position was given tremendous impetus by the 1997 amendments to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, P.L. 105-17), which required the alignment of special education and standards-based reforms. The IDEA Amendments indicated that special education could be made more effective by

1. raising the expectations for students with disabilities, to include high academic standards;

2. providing students with disabilities access to the general education curriculum;

3. ensuring that special education is a *service* rather than a *place* where students with disabilities are sent;

4. ensuring that families participate meaningfully in their children's education;

5. supporting high-quality, intensive professional development to ensure that all personnel have the skills and knowledge to enable students to meet developmental goals and, to the maximum extent possible, the challenging expectations and standards that have been established for all children; and

6. providing incentives for schoolwide improvement efforts and prereferral intervention to reduce the need to label children in order to address their learning needs.

To receive funds under IDEA, states must develop performance goals and standards that are consistent with those established for all other students and must regularly report progress toward meeting these goals (McLaughlin, Nolet, Rhim, & Henderson, 1999).

Modifications of Standards for Students with Special Needs

Although there seems to be growing consensus that standards do, indeed, apply to all students, the major issue now facing educators is *how* to include students with special needs in standards-based reform. The National Center for Educational Outcomes (NCEO) recommends that standards-setting committees determine how standards can be extended to truly include all students. In some instances, additional standards may have to be developed to meet the needs of students. For example, for students with moderate to severe disabilities, standards may need to be extended to include goals related to living independently, integrating into the community, and transitioning from school to work (McDonnell et al., 1997). For many if not most students with special needs, goals and standards can remain the same, but the sequence of objectives may need to be modified and specialized teaching strategies and materials developed to meet their specific educational needs (Buchanan & Helman, 1993).

The NCEO has developed a set of outcomes and indicators for all students, including students with disabilities. The outcomes and indicators vary according to the students' ages, grades, or developmental levels. Table 1 presents examples of outcomes for fourth grade students. The NCEO framework accommodates student diversity, including the types and severity of disabilities and provides flexibility in meeting standards. The framework also provides possible sources of data for each of the indicators (e.g., interviews, records, surveys, questionnaires).

McLaughlin and her colleagues (1999) offer a set of questions educators can use to make decisions about standards for students with disabilities (p. 70):

1. What are the essential subskills implicit in the long-range curricular standards?

2. What facts, concepts, and rules are absolutely necessary for adequate performance on a curriculum standard, and which are "optional"?

3. What deficits in enabling skills does a student currently have that will interfere with long-range curricular goals?

4. How well does the student use complex intellectual operations across various content domains?

5. What is the range of contexts in which a particular problem-solving skill or task will be needed?

Table 1. Education Outcomes and Indicators for Grade 4

Domains	Outcomes
Presence and participation	• Present in school • Participates in school activities
Family involvement	• Uses enrichments, adaptations, accommodations, or compensations to achieve outcomes in the major domains • Demonstrates the presence of family support and coping skills
Physical health	• Makes healthy lifestyle choices • Is aware of basic safety, fitness, and health care needs • Is physically fit
Responsibility and independence	• Demonstrates age-appropriate independence • Gets about in the environment • Is responsible for self
Contribution and citizenship	• Complies with school and community rules • Volunteers
Academic and functional literacy	Demonstrates competence in • communication • problem-solving strategies and critical thinking skills • math, reading, and writing skills • other academic and non-academic areas (e.g., science, social studies) • technology
Personal and social adjustment	• Copes effectively with personal challenges, frustrations, and stressors • Has a good self-image • Respects cultural and individual differences • Gets along with other people
Satisfaction	• Student satisfaction with school experiences • Parent/guardian satisfaction with the education the student is receiving • Community satisfaction with the education the student is receiving

Source: *Educational outcomes and indicators fo: grade 4*, by J. E. Ysseldyke, J. E., M. L. Thurlow, & R. N. Erickson, R. N, 1994, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, National Center for Educational Outcomes.

The IEP as a Tool for Including Students with Disabilities in Reform Efforts

One of the most important requirements of IDEA is that every student with a disability must have an individualized education or intervention plan. For students with disabilities, ages 3 to 21, the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) serves as the vehicle for ensuring that they are given the necessary special education and related services, supplementary aids, and other support they need to achieve their maximum potential. The IEP can also serve as a tool for determining how students will participate in standards-based reform, the support they will require to meet the standards, and how their progress toward mastery of the curriculum will be assessed (Dailey, Zantal-Wiener, & Roach, 2000).

The IEP (a) specifies how a child's disability affects his or her ability to participate in the general curriculum; (b) includes goals, objectives, and benchmarks to enable the student to be involved in the general curriculum; (c) describes modifications or supports necessary for the student to progress in the general curriculum; and (d) specifies the criteria to be used in measuring the student's attainment of specified goals and objectives. Schools must now give parents information about their child's progress as regularly as they do parents of students who do not have disabilities. Finally, the IEP also must include a specific statement indicating whether the student will participate in accountability programs and what, if any, individual modifications in the administration of assessments will be needed for successful participation. If the child is excluded from district- or statewide testing, the IEP must explain the alternative assessments that will be used for accountability purposes.

Effective Instruction for Students with Special Needs

Demanding content and performance standards and high expectations will result in high achievement for all students, but only if students receive high-quality instruction designed to meet those expectations (O'Day & Smith, cited in Smith, Furhman, & O'Day, 1994). The following have been identified as characteristics of effective instruction for these learners.

Improves through regular assessments and evaluations
Focuses on key concepts and principles
Builds on students' prior knowledge
Integrates higher level and basic skills
Provides instruction on specific strategies
Includes the frequent review of key concepts
Consistently uses collaborative learning
Focuses on student-directed instruction
Is culturally and linguistically relevant
Relies on shared responsibility and collaboration

Improves through Regular Assessments and Evaluations

Learning is enhanced when teachers provide instruction that is consistent with students' needs. Effective teachers are skilled at analyzing students' performance, identifying gaps in skills and knowledge, and developing instruction to address those gaps (Garcia, Wilkinson, & Ortiz, 1995; Shure, Morrocco, DiGisi, & Yenkin, 1999). They conduct curriculum-based assessments (e.g., observations, inventories, and analyses of student work) to gauge students' progress and translate evaluation data directly into instructional strategies to improve performance (Tucker, 1989; King-Sears, Burgess, & Lawson, 1999). Repeated measurements not only provide excellent data for instructional planning and intervention, but also help fine-tune instruction and form the basis for an assessment portfolio that tracks students' growth.

Focuses on Key Concepts and Principles

Effective teachers analyze the curriculum they are expected to teach and identify those areas in which students with special needs are likely to have difficulty (Shure et al., 1999). They organize instruction around key principles, concepts, and themes to facilitate the most efficient and broadest acquisition of knowledge across a range of topics. This type of delivery helps students understand "smaller" ideas by relating them to "bigger" ideas (Burke, Hagan, & Grossen, 1998).

Builds on Students' Prior Knowledge

Students develop new knowledge through active construction and by relating content to what they already know about a topic (Leinhardt, 1992; Brophy, 1992). Thus, effective instruction for students with special needs draws heavily on students' prior knowledge. This principle is violated when teachers use topics, materials, and texts that are experientially, linguistically, or culturally unrelated to students' backgrounds (Garcia et al., 1995). For example, students will find it difficult to respond appropriately when discussions revolve around leprechauns, blarney stones, and the joys of eating corned beef and cabbage if they have no prior experience with these topics.

Struggling learners often lack the skills they need to successfully accomplish tasks successfully. Often teachers fill in these gaps in background knowledge (Burke et al., 1998). To do this, they arrange content into themes or strands that more easily demonstrate connections, reinforce key principles and concepts, and scaffold learning. Scaffolding includes such strategies as simplifying directions, teaching key vocabulary and main ideas, and providing examples as advance organizers for a learning task.

Integrates Higher Level and Basic Skills

Standards emphasize understanding, application, critical thinking, creativity, and problem solving (Brophy, 1992). However, students with special needs also typically need interventions that help them master basic skills. IEPs must therefore address these competing priorities.

Effective teachers are skilled at integrating basic skills in the context of higher order skill development. For example, reading instruction emphasizes comprehension but also includes instruction in phonics and word recognition. Teachers use process-oriented writing strategies that emphasize communicating ideas in a well-organized, coherent fashion, but they also present specific lessons to teach mechanics such as correct spelling, grammar, and punctuation. Teaching basic skills in context avoids the kind of problems that occur when teachers attempt to simplify tasks by breaking them down into what they consider to be smaller, less complex units. "Simple" tasks, stripped of context, can become quite abstract (e.g., using mnemonics to help students remember correct spellings when they do not yet understand word meanings), particularly for students with speech and language impairments or those with limited English proficiency (Cummins, 1984).

Provides Instruction on Specific Strategies

Students with special needs may have difficulty figuring out what strategies to use to accomplish tasks or solve problems and may not be able to figure out how to redirect their behavior if the strategies they are using are not working (Burke et al., 1998). Effective teachers provide explicit strategy instruction to help students better understand how to approach tasks and achieve identified goals.

Includes the Frequent Review of Key Concepts and Ideas

Effective teachers frequently review key concepts and ideas to facilitate learning, longer retention, and better application (Burke et al., 1998). These reviews are distributed over time, using a range of examples and related tasks that represent the range of knowledge applications students are expected to master. Effective teachers provide multiple opportunities for students to review previously learned concepts and teach students to draw on and apply their prior knowledge to the task or problem at hand.

Consistently Uses Collaborative Learning

Learning is facilitated by the interactive discourse that occurs during lessons and activities in which students work collaboratively (Leinhardt, 1992). Ideal instructional activities for students with disabilities or with other special needs are those that allow them to interact freely while working on tasks that invite discussion, questioning, and response (Wong-Fillmore & Valadez, 1986). Collaborative learning activities that require students to be accountable to one another help students with special needs more fully engage in the task. Such collaborative activities also provide excellent opportunities for natural language practice (Willig, Swedo, & Ortiz, 1987). These interactions in cooperative learning groups involve a greater range of verbal skills than is typical of teacher-led instruction that emphasizes giving the correct answer in a specific amount of time (McGroarty, 1989). Cooperative learning strategies allow teachers to incorporate language lessons into content-area teaching, thus providing additional opportunities for students to develop high levels of functional language and academic skills.

Focuses on Student-Directed Instruction

The teacher's role is to scaffold and respond to student learning (Brophy, 1992) by providing personal guidance, assistance, and support (Burke et al., 1998). Burke, Hagan, and Grossen (1998) maintain that this type of "mediated scaffolding provides a systematic transition from initial teacher-directed, modeled, structured, and prompted practice within defined problem types to a more naturalistic environment of student-directed, unstructured, unpredictable problems that represent a wide range of problem types" (p. 36). As their skills increase, students begin regulating their own learning and assume greater levels of responsibility and independence (Leinhardt, 1992). The teacher's role shifts to that of guide or facilitator of student learning (Cummins, 1984).

Is Culturally and Linguistically Relevant

Instruction for students with disabilities must be linguistically and culturally relevant. In contrast to curriculum and instruction with a "negative" orientation, positive approaches incorporate students' culture and language in the teaching and learning process, communicate value and respect for students' diverse backgrounds, and reinforce their cultural identity, while at the same time teaching critical language, academic and social skills (Garcia et al., 1995).

Effective teachers are intimately familiar with the cultural resources their students bring to class. They also are aware of their own culture and how it influences their view of the teaching and learning process and the resulting classroom culture. Thus, effective teachers are able to manage the classroom in culturally sensitive ways, integrating the instructional content, materials, and methods with the cultural backgrounds of their students (Villa, 1991; Farr & Turnbull, 1997).

Effective teachers recognize that students must see themselves — their life experiences, language, culture, norms and values, and physical attributes — in the curriculum (Taylor, 2000). Effective teachers therefore carefully select instructional materials and texts to ensure that students have access to culturally relevant learning experiences. The roles of family and community members depicted in instructional materials should be consistent with contemporary community roles and congruent with the family and community's values, beliefs, and practices (Santos, Fowler, Corso, & Bruns, 2000). Culturally and linguistically diverse individuals and people with disabilities should be presented in ways that are free of stereotypes.

When necessary, educators use "cultural brokers" or guides to help them select and adapt materials to ensure they are appropriate. Cultural brokers can serve an important role in ensuring that parents and families feel welcome in schools and that they are able to become involved in their children's education in ways that are comfortable and appropriate for them. Family/school partnerships are critical since parents are the primary advocates for students with disabilities. Collaboration between home and school helps parents understand how they can influence their children's success in school. At the same time, teachers develop a greater sense of understanding and appreciation for the child's home context.

Effective teachers are familiar with research on how students acquire first and second languages, which they use to make informed decisions related to the language of instruction for language minority students. Such knowledge is critical the increasing linguistic diversity in schools and data showing that the areas most frequently targeted for special education intervention are language arts and reading.

Several National Research Council reports (Meyer & Fienberg, 1992; August & Hakuta, 1997; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998) conclude that native language instruction provides an important scaffold for English Language Learners. In exemplary programs, the student's native language serves a multitude of purposes and functions. Using this native language is a key instructional strategy. For example, limited English proficient students are taught to read in their native language; once they acquire reading skills in this language and adequate levels of English proficiency, teachers help them transfer and extend these skills to reading in English (Snow et al., 1998). According to Snow and her colleagues (1998), if English Language Learners do not have access to bilingual education programs and are not literate in their native language, priority should be given to helping them develop proficiency in spoken English. Formal reading instruction should be postponed until they have adequate English skills to profit from instruction in Englis' (although exactly what "adequate" means remains an empirical question). This does not mean that the classroom is free of texts. Rather, students should be provided with a rich print environment in which texts are initially used to develop oral language materials (e.g., teachers read and discuss award-winning literature organized in thematic units).

Concepts about bilingualism, native language, and ESL instruction may be foreign to some educators who work with students with disabilities. In a study of IEP goals and objectives selected for limited English proficient Hispanic students with learning disabilities or mental retardation, Ortiz and Wilkinson (1989) found that poor academic progress in general and poor progress in reading were the primary reasons for referring students to special education. The authors also found that the most frequently specified IEP goals for these students were related to reading and language arts. Yet, of the 203 IEPs examined, only two percent stated that some instruction would be carried out in Spanish. None included English as a Second Language goals and objectives. Students' language proficiency was virtually not considered as special education services for these students were designed.

Failure to recommend native language instruction may reflect a common misconception that LEP students with disabilities should be taught in English (Cummins, 1984; Ortiz, 1984; Ortiz & Garcia, 1990). Educators reason that children with disabilities will have difficulty developing language skills, require more time than other students to master language skills, and be confused by bilingual instruction. Many consider it in the best interest of students to provide instruction in a single language — English. Yet, this approach contradicts research on second language and literacy acquisition. Moreover, submersion in English, without even the benefit of ESL instruction, is unlikely to produce significant academic gains for students who are limited English proficient and have disabilities. Providing English instruction for monolingual Spanish speakers with disabilities is akin to telling a monolingual English-speaking parent that because their child who has a disability has failed to learn to read in English, teachers are now going to provide reading instruction in German. Switching from English to German is nonsensical, as is

switching from teaching in students' native language to teaching in English when students have documented disabilities in their first language.

It should be noted that teachers' perceptions that children with disabilities lack the social and academic competence and adaptive behaviors to integrate successfully into the mainstream culture puts these students at a disadvantage in the schooling process (Mallory, 1994). Thus, even majority students with disabilities are subject to prejudice and exclusion much like that experienced by students of color. For example, like English Language Learners, children with language impairments have difficulty meeting the discourse demands of routine social conversations and higher level, more abstract classroom and teacher talk (Mallory, 1994). The inability to communicate effectively also makes integration into the social culture of classrooms, schools, and communities difficult for these students. Culturally and linguistically diverse students with disabilities must be taught in ways that simultaneously address their disability-related needs and their language and cultural characteristics.

Relies on Shared Responsibility and Collaboration

Educating a heterogeneous student population can be more effectively accomplished through shared responsibility and collaboration (Garcia et al., 1995). Standards provide a unified set of expectations for student achievement and for what should be taught across subjects and grade levels (McLaughlin et al., 1999), thus facilitating teacher cooperation and collaboration. An inclusive, unified education system requires a foundation of interdependent relationships among all educators, including general educators and special educators. Because many students with special needs spend a large portion of their time in mainstream classrooms, general education teachers must share responsibility for skill and content instruction for these students. By the same token, special education teachers must have a greater understanding of the general education curriculum, especially given the IDEA requirement that students with disabilities be given access to this curriculum.

BARRIERS TO INCLUSION OF STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS IN STANDARDS-BASED REFORM

Teacher Concerns

A study conducted by McLaughlin, Henderson, and Rhim (1998) found that teachers had difficulty determining how to help students with disabilities access a broad and balanced curriculum, how to focus instruction, and how to balance competing priorities. Teachers reported having difficulty finding time to teach required content while teaching more basic skills that might be more important in the long term given a student's disabilities (McLaughlin et al., 1999). These concerns highlight the need to give teachers time to plan and collaborate as well as professional development opportunities to support their involvement in standards-based reform.

High-Stakes Testing

Students with disabilities are routinely excluded from participation in national and state accountability systems for a number of reasons. Frequently, the IEP recommends non-participation, the student is receiving a different curriculum in a special education setting, or staff believe that the student cannot be assessed meaningfully (Mazzeo et al., 2000). Accountability systems involve high stakes, and oftentimes rewards and sanctions are distributed according to students' performance on district- or statewide testing. If student performance is used to rate teachers' effectiveness or to classify schools as low or high performing, struggling learners may be excluded from participation so that scores are not lowered or referred to special education, because a disability label often makes it easier to justify exclusion. Exclusion policies can have far-reaching, negative consequences. If students are not part of the assessment program, they are not targeted to receive resources to improve performance. Fortunately, professional groups are calling for sanctions against schools that embrace such exclusionary practices (McDonnell et al., 1997).

Teacher Qualifications

There is a gap between the demand for special education teachers and the number of qualified special education graduates. Data reported in the Seventeenth Annual Report to Congress on the implementation of IDEA indicated that 25,829 special education teachers were needed to fill positions that were either vacant or held by uncertified teachers. The 1997 IDEA Congressional findings reported that minority students comprised a third of the public school enrollments but that only 13 percent of the teaching force was made up of minorities. IDEA called for more aggressive recruitment efforts to bring minorities into the special education profession

Unfortunately, however, the pipeline for minority teachers is "leaky" (Hill, Carjuzaa, Aramburo, & Baca, 1993). Factors that may affect CLD students in public education, such as poverty and low academic achievement, also prevent many minority students from entering the higher education academic pipeline. Rising tuition rates and lack of financial aid decrease the pool even further. The transfer rate from 2- to 4-year institutions for minority students is less than 10 percent, and graduation rates after transfer are disturbingly low. Students who want to become teachers may not be able to enter teacher preparation programs because of requirements related to minimum grade point averages or scores on basic skill assessments (Kushner & Ortiz, 2000). Smith (cited in Hill et al., 1993) reports that 96 percent of African American applicants and 84 percent of Hispanics may be denied admission to teacher education programs on the basis of their reading test scores alone. Failing state-mandated exit competency tests required for teacher certification further diminishes the number of minorities in the teaching profession (Romero, 1992).

Experience suggests that efforts to increase the number of minority teachers available to work with culturally and linguistically diverse learners will not be sufficient to meet the needs of a growing CLD population (Kushner & Ortiz, 2000). Competencies must be identified and programs developed to prepare prospective and currently employed teachers to better serve the needs of these learners. From the perspectives of both CLD students and students with

disabilities, the training of general education teachers is imperative given that students with disabilities will spend the majority of their school careers in mainstream classes.

Related Issues

Although not the focus of this paper, two other barriers should be noted. One noteworthy barrier is the inequitable distribution of education resources and access to knowledge among students in schools. The point has already been made that as a result of the severe shortage of special education teachers and teachers with expertise related to the education of culturally and linguistically diverse learners and low-income students, these students are taught by the least experienced and least qualified teachers. Other factors that affect students' opportunity to learn include less access to technology, fewer offerings and enrollments in advanced courses, and tracking by ethnicity and gender. Therefore, opportunity-to-learn standards are an important component of reform efforts for students with special needs.

A second issue is the need for leadership in standards-based reform to ensure access for students with special needs. State education agencies can provide this leadership by creating a coherent vision and strategy for including students with special needs in reform activities, by creating state plans, by developing content and performance standards, and by providing technical assistance to school districts to implement goals and standards (August et al., 1994). However, Clune (1993) cautions that there is a lack of demonstrated capacity in departments of education to act as change agents — a situation that is worsening. Furhman (1994) concurs, noting that it is ironic that those charged with providing technical assistance in curriculum reform and school improvement are oftentimes the very same individuals who monitored districts and identified problems over the years but were unable to help resolve these issues.

Research Needs

A major barrier to including students with special needs in standards-based reform is the lack of empirically validated research on this topic. A recent National Research Council report (McDonnell et al., 1997) poses a series of questions that must be answered to more effectively include students with disabilities in standards-based reform:

1. What legal and ethical responsibilities do educators have to ensure that students with disabilities have the opportunities they need to meet high standards?

2. What constitutes an appropriate education for students with disabilities in a standards-based education environment?

3. How can standards-based reform raise expectations specifically for students with disabilities and stimulate schools and districts to address their educational needs?

4. How can curricula and instructional methods that work best for students with different disabilities be incorporated into a common standards-based curriculum?

5. In which situations, if any, should standards and outcomes be altered for students with disabilities?

6. How should key decisions be made about participation of these students in standards-based reform?

The changing demography of today's schools, the increasing number of students with special needs, and the poor academic performance of these students underscore the importance of finding answers to these questions. Otherwise, efforts to provide appropriate educational services for students with special needs will continue to be driven by the assumptions, intuitions, and best guesses of educators.

SUMMARY

Teachers who work with students with special needs have a comprehensive vision of how these students will be integrated into standards-based reform efforts. To date, standards-based reform has ignored the changing demographics and increasing diversity of America's schools. Consequently, it has been virtually impossible to align goals, standards, curricula, instruction, and assessments for students with special needs. Not surprisingly, educators have been unable to close the significant gap between the achievement of students with special needs and their mainstream peers. Some fear that as a result of the standards movement, this gap may actually widen.

O'Day and Smith (cited in Goertz et al., 1996), reflecting on the stagnant achievement levels of students with special needs, have great hope that reforms can change the educational circumstances of these students:

> A well-designed systemic reform strategy could provide an opportunity for extending reforms in challenging curriculum and instruction to all schools and all segments of the student population. Without a system wide strategy, curricular reforms run the risk of simply "changing the rules of the game" while excluding from play poor and minority children in schools that lack the support and wherewithal to make the necessary but difficult changes in curriculum and instruction. (p. 59)

The rules of the game have been changed; it is time to develop the system wide strategy.

Discussion Questions

1. Is it realistic to expect students with disabilities to meet the same high academic standards as all other students? If yes, how? If not, what constitutes an "appropriate" education for these students in the context of standards-based reform?

2. If it is realistic to hold students with special needs to the same high standards, how do we convince general and special educators that that is the case and that they are responsible for ensuring that these students meet the standards?

3. How does the type of disability and level of severity factor into decisions about participation (or nonparticipation) of students with special needs in standards-based reform?

4. How can teachers balance instruction to ensure that students with disabilities master higher order skills as well as the more basic or functional skills they need to become independent, productive citizens?

5. How can we ensure that all personnel have the skills and knowledge to enable students to meet developmental goals and, to the maximum extent possible, the challenging expectations and standards that have been established for all children?

6. How can schools be organized to provide time and opportunity for general and special education teachers to meet and plan instruction and then coordinate delivery of that instruction in a variety of settings?

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CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

If standards-based reform efforts are to succeed, we must find ways to better meet the educational needs of all students. An important first step is to consider how we view diversity. Rather than viewing diversity as a deficit, we must move to viewing diversity as an asset. As Roland Barth (1990) writes:

> Differences hold great opportunity for learning. Differences offer free, abundant, and renewable resources. I would like to see our compulsion for eliminating differences replaced by an equally compelling focus on making use of these differences to improve schools. What is important about people — and about schools — is what is different, not what is the same. (pp. 514–515)

We must move from a model of "separating out" students who learn differently to supporting students within and across the school. In the past, our solution for addressing diversity has been to diversify our teachers, for example by hiring special education, Title 1, and English as a Second Language teachers. This has resulted in a service delivery system that is all too often fragmented in its response to students' needs. We have compartmentalized our resources and our knowledge about how to address the unique needs of all students.

Today's schools are faced with the twin challenges of addressing an increasing diversity of student's needs, while at the same time attempting to increase expectations and students' performance. To be successful, we must move from our currently isolated professional practices to a culture of continuous improvement and collaborative inquiry.

The papers presented at McREL's Diversity Roundtable III: Including Special Needs Students in Standards-Based Reform, ideas shared during discussions at the roundtable, research, and McREL experience suggest at least three areas that educators can focus on to ensure that special needs students benefit from a standards-based system:

1. Distributed leadership
2. Expanded instructional strategies
3. Comprehensive assessment and accountability systems

DISTRIBUTED LEADERSHIP

Although certainly no single individual can meet all of the unique needs of every student, collectively we have a wealth of knowledge to draw upon to address these needs. Drawing on this collective knowledge will require leadership on the part of the whole school community. Administrators, teachers, and staff members must work productively with parents and

community members to create a shared vision and responsibility for the success of every student. And schools and districts must ensure that teachers acquire the knowledge and skills they need to help students succeed. Schools can only be successful by becoming learning communities themselves.

As outlined in *Leadership for School Improvement* (McREL, 2000), the challenge for schools is to develop a learning organization that builds on the capacity of the school community. Richard Elmore (2000) reminds us that "in a knowledge-intense enterprise like teaching and learning, there is no way to perform these complex tasks without widely distributing the responsibility for leadership" (p. 15). The concept of "distributed leadership" focuses on improving instructional strategies and student learning as the center of effective change. Although both professional development and collaborative support are necessary components of this change process, it is only when they are tied to improving instructional practices that they result in improved student learning and performance. Roundtable participants emphasized that developing strong shared leadership and responsibility across schools and districts is critical to changing the culture of schools and, thus, to the success of changes designed to include special needs students in the teaching and learning exchange.

EXPANDED INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

The movement to establish content standards was not meant to result in standardized practices of instruction, but rather to create an opportunity to broaden the instructional strategies that teachers use in the classroom in view of learning expected. Roundtable participants argued that if schools are expected to improve student performance, teachers need to be provided with a range of instructional strategies that have proven to be effective with all learners, including those with diverse backgrounds and special needs. Further, they need professional development experiences to help them use these strategies with their students.

Roundtable participants pointed out that when selecting instructional strategies, teachers need to develop a deeper understanding of differentiated instruction. As outlined by Carol Ann Tomlinson (2000), standards-based instruction and differentiated instruction can compliment each other if we understand that standards, benchmarks, and the curriculum provide us with "what" to teach, while differentiation addresses "how" to teach students with different learning requirements:

> Differentiation suggests that you can challenge all learners by providing materials and tasks on the standard at varied levels of difficulty, with varying degrees of scaffolding, through multiple instructional groups, and with time variations. Further, differentiation suggests that teachers can craft lessons in ways that tap into multiple student interests to promote heighten learner interest in the standard. (p. 9)

Differentiated instruction provides a methodology for addressing the unique needs of diverse students. The same material or tasks can be presented at various levels of difficulty. In addition, differentiated instruction allows students to demonstrate their knowledge in various

ways. Increased expectations and outcomes can be anticipated for all students by varying the time, intensity, and scope of experiences with which students are provided.

A recent study on teacher quality, *How Teaching Matters* (Wenglinsky, 2000), attempted to link students' academic performance with classroom practices by reanalyzing data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). It is worth noting that researchers who reanalyzed the NAEP data on the impact of professional development found that "students whose teachers receive professional development in working with different student populations outperform students whose teachers lack professional development on this topic" (p. 23). One topic of conversation at McREL's roundtable was the fact that when special education teachers transfer into general education, they often come with a broader range of skills. These teachers are much more at ease using differentiated instruction and providing instructional accommodations for students with diverse learning needs. As a result, they often are more successful with these diverse student populations. It is interesting to note that much of the research on effective instructional strategies has been conducted with special needs students and other at-risk populations.

Comprehensive Assessment and Accountability Systems

One of the promises of standards-based reform was to not only include students with disabilities in district and state assessments, but also to rethink how these students are assessed. Roundtable participants said that standards-based reform was supposed to provide opportunities for authentic assessment for students to demonstrate knowledge and skills. This was based on the premise that in a standards-based system, students should have multiple opportunities to demonstrate, in different ways, their knowledge and understanding of the material. The hope was that in a standards-based system, we would broaden our assessment practices to allow for increased participation in classroom assessments as well as grade-level, school, district, and state assessments. Although many of the participants' districts have provided reasonable accommodations for students, such as extended periods of time and Braille tests, these practices do not seem to be widely used in classrooms on a daily basis. Although it remains important to include students with special needs in district- and statewide assessments, participants noted that it is even more important to find ways to broaden classroom assessment practices so that performance levels for *all* students are more accurately assessed.

Roundtable participants felt that there should be various types of assessments including observations, demonstrations, peer and self-evaluations, to name a few. In addition, teachers need opportunities to learn to better use both formal and informal assessments that are linked to the curriculum. For example, if students are learning the skill of computation, then it might be appropriate to vary the time special needs students have to complete the assessment as an accommodation and not require these students to complete 30 problems in the "mad math minute."

Finally, participants discussed the fact that Individual Education Plans (IEPs) should include evaluations of how the student is performing in relation to district and state standards. In a recent article in *Educational Researcher*, Lorrie Shepard (2000) describes a model for dynamic

classroom assessment that is a part of an instructional and support system for students and teachers. She outlines a number of components including prior knowledge, feedback, transferring and generalizing knowledge, explicit criteria about student work, self-assessment, and evaluation of teaching practices. Her recommendations provoke us to think more deeply about our views of learning, instruction, and the role of assessment in providing equal opportunities for diverse learners. Many of these same topics were explored during the roundtable discussions.

Accountability is of particular concern to educators across the country. Roundtable participants agreed that states, districts, schools, and classrooms all must have accountability systems that include all students. Although all students should be held to higher levels of performance, to achieve this students must first have access to the general education curriculum, differentiated instruction, a range of instructional strategies, and accommodations and modifications in both instruction and assessment practices. IEPs should be more tightly coupled with standards, benchmarks, and assessments. If we are to truly link special education and general education, then this must be reflected more clearly in students' IEPs. Finally the accountability system should include multiple measures that provide ample opportunities for students to demonstrate their knowledge and skills.

SUMMARY

We still have much work to do to fully realize the potential of standards-based reform. This goal is made more challenging when it comes to meeting the needs of all learners, including diverse and special needs students. As we raise expectations, how do we "raise the floor" as well as the ceiling? As we search for ways to expand leadership opportunities, how do we tap into the talents and skills of educators across the school, including categorically funded staff? As we develop professional development opportunities, how can we choose those areas that will be of benefit to all of our diverse learners? How should we provide for authentic assessments and reasonable accommodations? As we develop new models and methods of accountability, how do we include a broader range of instructional and assessment strategies that allow all students to participate at higher levels than they are currently?

These are not easy questions to answer, but roundtable presenters and participants were optimistic about our chances for success. When these problems concerned only special educators, they did not have much currency in the system as a whole. However, as the student population of our schools continues to become more diverse, these issues become more relevant and important to everyone involved in education. This creates a unique opportunity to forge a broader coalition of people concerned about the unique learning needs of *all* students. Having a shared focus on the increased performance of each student allows us to create a common agenda that has not been present before now.

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